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ROBERT SIMPSON, EDITOR

Volume VIII MARCH 1, 1926 Number 4

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Subscription Price—Domestic, single copy, 20 cents; yearly subscription, $4.00; Canada $4.25; foreign $4.50.

Published twice a month by MYSTERY MAGAZINE COMPANY, 1133 Broadway, New York City. LOUIS F. WILZIN, Proprietor. Entered as second-class matter December 24, 1925, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.

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All remittances should be sent by Express Money Order, Post Office Order, Check, or Draft, to insure safety. Manuscripts must be accompanied by sufficient postage for return. The publishers disclaim all responsibility for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts.

Around the Corner

ORTUNATELY, in the interests of progress, man is by nature a restless animal. He is never satisfied, never really content, but is always curious to solve the mystery of what is around the corner.

Around MYSTERY MAGAZINE's next corner —the March 15 issue—will be found the first installment of a new and tensely interesting mystery serial, "Sinister House," by Charles G. Booth.

David Belasco, the Wizard of the Drama, presents "The Most Mysterious Happening in My Life," ably assisted by Bide Dudley.

Dale Collins carries on with the third *Peter Lamb* story, most aptly entitled "And the Fat Was in the Fire."

Lemuel de Bra, in his own powerful and inimitable way, reveals an incisive slice of life in "The Lost Canteen."

George C. Henderson, in an entirely different atmosphere, shows how a man will fight for the thing that is dearest to him, long after hope has died and the shadow of the rope has ceased to be merely a shadow and has become a noose of rosined hemp scraping the neck. "The Spark of Life" is a complete novelette and its other name is suspense.

These are some of the reasons why it would be well to remember that MYSTERY MAGAZINE is published twice a month —on the first and fifteenth.

Wings to Wisdom

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

CHAPTER I

THE BRIDLE PATH

THERE have been girls in history who made men lose thrones and win thrones, who made men fight armies and explore unknown seas, but as far as I can discover, there never was a girl in creation, other than one particular one, who could make me hold down a job in a brokerage office for three long months.

But that's where I was, right in the season when the thermometer hits thirty to sixty below on the Yukon, and a man, breaking trail for a dog team, gets a feeling of elation that beats everything from hard cider to hasheesh. And the result of my being nice, neat, and civilized all that time. Well, I've been through some tough Friday nights in my time, but that Friday night was the worst I ever agonized in.

However, I'll go back and get a running start toward that catastrophic evening. Three months before, I was inoffensively crossing Central Park on my way to—well, I was thinking of New Guinea as well as Alaska, so we'll just say I was inoffensively crossing Central Park.

It was dark, and as I came to a place where the walk intersects the bridle path, I heard the sound of a galloping horse. I stopped and looked toward the noise. A girl on a horse flashed for an instant into the light of an electric lamp, then vanished.

The sight I had of her was just like what you see when lightning cuts darkness, but I held every detail of it. She had just turned her head forward after a glance behind, and she was laughing, a roguish, challenging laugh that twisted up the corners of her eyes as well as her little mouth, and somehow accentuated the healthy high color of her cheeks. She was beautiful, and infinitely luring.

I stood there, in the middle of the bridle path, staring into the dark and feeling as if I'd lost something important. And then, suddenly, I came out of my trance in time to dodge a black mare that seemed to pop up out of the ground behind me. The horse swerved, too, and the rider slid sideways out of the saddle with a wail of anguish.

Now I'm reasonably fast, but I must admit it was pure luck that I fielded that chap as neatly as if he'd been a high fly to center field. He just slipped into my arms, never touched the ground; but he continued to yelp as if he'd landed on a cactus spike.

The mare stopped, turned, and made a business-like effort to get by us toward her stable. I dropped the rider in a bush, caught the mare by a lucky dive, and swung into the saddle. An instant later we were thumping down the bridle path after that girl.

She was a long way ahead, but the mare had racing blood in her, and we caught up. She looked around startled as we surged toward her and pulled in her horse.

"Why, Jer——" she began, and then saw me.

"I borrowed his horse," I explained. "A man who comes off as easily as he does ought to ride a tricycle. My name's Chris Dunstan, and I am glad to meet you. Let's ride!"

FOR perhaps three seconds she stared at me, wide-eyed, not afraid, but taking me in. Then she laughed, and we rode.

That's how Miss Millicent Raconsby Pearse, as the society columns called her, and I became friends—good friends—and how I let myself in for that Friday night.

We were riding, three months later. We always met on the bridlepath, and at the same time, six o'clock, an hour after the silly old brokerage office had shut down. For the tenth or eleventh time I proposed to her. But instead of laughing at me, and teasing me, as she had before, she kept her chin high and straight forward.

"Why not, Milly?" I asked her—begged her, really. "I know on Monday you're due to marry somebody named Masterson who has scads of money and reputation, and so on. But you don't love him, I'll wager. Marry me instead, any time you like."

"And what makes you think that I love you?" she asked bitterly.

Of course that floored me, the words and the tone. I didn't think she loved me but I hoped so, believing in miracles as I do. So I went off on another tack.

"Milly, girl, there's something troubling you—been troubling you almost since I met you, even before your engagement was announced to this chap, and it's gotten worse since then. We've laughed together, and I've yarned and lied about things that have happened to me, but once in a while I've seen those eyes of yours get serious, sad and mysterious. You look at me, somehow, and it cuts. Is there anything I can do?"

She laughed, and it was different from that first laugh I had seen on her face.

"Anything you can do!" she repeated, and her voice was almost scornful. "No, there doesn't seem to be a thing you can do. Except, of course, shake hands and wish me good fortune in my matrimonial career. I shan't ride tomorrow or Sunday."

Lord, but that stung. Not to see her again! I'd been as respectable as an undertaker, as civilized as a librarian, for three whole months, and I'd made no progress at all. How I wished I'd spent more time studying women's ways and less on wandering around! She'd become engaged only about a month after I'd met her, but nevertheless, when she told me, I had felt confident that somehow I'd win.

But day by day she'd seemed to grow less friendly, distant. Some days I could almost feel her suddenly getting more stiff and socialized, and formal, like her mother, Mrs. Courtoyer Fletcher Pearse, whose picture I'd seen in the papers. And no matter how I tried to please her it got worse.

I'd always thought that if ever I ran into a girl I knew was mine I'd be able to make her see it my way. But though I'd made love as gently as I could, I hadn't. You can't reform a maverick in three months.

The fact that she had money didn't bother me any, of course, for I've never had any trouble getting it when I wanted some. Right then I was planning to look up a little lode I'd found in Alaska—it's a big country—and kept secret in case I ever needed *beaucoup* cash. But the only fortune I ever had kept me busy nine hours a day looking after it, so I blew it. Money isn't a curse, it's an anchor, and I like to travel.

Right then I was about flat, and paying stable bills by collecting pawntickets, but she knew I wasn't a fortune-hunter. Yet, when I caught her looking at me time and time again, I felt there was something accusing in her expression.

I asked her often enough what it was all about, but she always denied it, as she had denied it that night. What was it? That was what kept me awake nights when I should have been hoarding up energy to spend on my respectable job downtown.

"Milly," I said, and I could hardly keep a bleat out of my voice, "you don't mean that you and I are parting forever, that you're turning me down?"

Her eyes, with that queer something in them, looked into mine.

"Yes, Chris, I do. You've been awfully interesting, most entertaining, as good as a travel and adventure book, but as a husband——"

She didn't finish the sentence. For a moment I gripped the reins tight in my hand, for I was fighting a desire to reach over and lift her from her horse onto mine and gallop away with her. But the desire passed, for I knew that was no way to treat a delicately brought-up girl like Millicent Pearse.

"I hope you will be happy," I muttered.

"I shall be very happy," she said vehemently. "Mr. Masterson and I will be very, very happy."

That ended it. I swung my horse around and left her. A man has no right to inflict himself on a girl. But it is strange how tenuous and unimportant a thing like right becomes sometimes when the heart is thumping and clamoring for action.

I felt as if I were riding straight for hell as I left her, but I took it at a gallop. Never mind the rest of that night.

CHAPTER II

WANDERING

THAT was a terrible Saturday morning. Yes, I went to the office. Routine did that to me, and I was there before I realized just what I was doing.

Have you ever been plagued by a desire to take a tall, thin, dictatorial ass with a mustache one-half the width of his mouth, turn him upside-down, and see if he will fit into a ticker tape basket? That was the yearning I had to fight.

This perambulating adding machine in question was the junior partner of the highly respected and exceedingly dull Stock Exchange house with which I was connected. He had been pestering me with nasty little remarks about my inefficiency as a comparison clerk for nearly three months, ever since I'd picked that job out of the possibilities at an employment agency.

And the worst of it was he was right. As a comparison clerk I was a complete washout, as we used to say on flying field, or a bust, if you prefer bridge terms. But, nevertheless, it hurts to have somebody sneaking up to your elbow and whispering biting comments about your intelligence, even if you know no intelligence and nothing else but a rubber stamp marked "Compared" is needed for the job. And it's frightful the morning after you've lost all chance for happiness.

That desire to stuff him into the basket with the rest of the statistics was growing on me; it was just about at a head. My eyes measured him, and the tempting basket. I took a step toward him. The devil of impulse had me in his grip.

And then I stopped.

"Don't do it," I said to myself. "When you'd cooled down the ignominy of having manhandled a hot-

house plant like that would make you feel worse than you do now, if that is possible. And he'd swear you'd tried to murder him and land you in closer confinement than this office."

That steadied me a bit. I committed no assault that morning, but I dare say I was guilty of various crimes and bookkeeping misdemeanors with my little outfit of stamps. When quitting time came soon after noon, I had only a hazy idea worked out, of hocking whatever I had left and getting out to New Mexico. There I'd get somebody to stake me to a couple of jacks and an outfit, and I'd go wandering out into the desert in quest of a good-looking streak of silver or anything else that looked right.

The bare thought of that rich lode up in Alaska was enough to sear my brow, and I suppose I meditated on the desert because girls with sweet, laughing mouths and queer eyes with mysteries in them would be scarce there.

BUT I wanted a change—quick. I took my grouch out of the office. Before I knew it I was walking furiously through Washington Square, which is a mile or two from where I started.

A green bus, with mighty few passengers huddled on top, rushed by me, and more from wanting a run than anything else I pursued it and hopped on board. If I hadn't caught it—but wait. We ploughed through the Fifth Avenue traffic while I sat on high, muffled in my coat and frowning down on it all. Later we turned into Riverside Drive.

The buds weren't swelling on the trees yet, and the grass was still last year's goods, and now and then on the grass there'd be a pile of dirty snow congealed into dirtier ice at the bottom.

The sight of the Hudson rather soothed me, and I got off in the lower Eighties and headed down through the park, crossed a bridge that spanned the railroad tracks, and found myself on filled ground beside the river. Half a dozen baseball games appeared to be in progress in the same space and none of the lads seemed to mind it a bit. They were New Yorkers and accustomed to congestion. I threaded through them and came to a landing stage that was groaning against its braces in the slight swell that came across the river.

There was no one else on the float but a rather hard-looking customer with a chest bulging out to threaten the top button of a spruce black suit. He was standing beside the mooring of a rowboat looking down the river.

I took off my coat, for I was weary of its restraint, and the sun was doing its best to warm things up, with some measure of success. When I had gotten my pipe going I felt better.

AFTER a few minutes, my hard-boiled companion left the stage to wander aimlessly up onto the baseball ground. I paid no particular attention to his movements, although he had favored me with a sharp stare, and looked out across the dirty gray water imagining that the Palisades across the way were the foothills of some country I know.

A chorus of warning shouts, followed almost instantly by a decided crack, made me whirl about. My tough friend had been hit by a batted ball, and had gone down flat on his back. I started up the gangway, but before I had reached him he was literally engulfed in a crowd of spectators. I gathered from the comments that the ball had hit him a glancing blow on the side of the head, enough to knock him unconscious, but not to fracture his skull. They got

him onto a couple of planks and carried him toward a railroad switchman's shack, while some one ran ahead to telephone for an ambulance.

I turned back to the landing stage, and idly walked over to the rowboat. I was standing thus when I became conscious of a murmur of sound from somewhere, which gradually increased. When I looked up I found a flying boat which had come up the river descending opposite the stage. Then it occurred to me that this place was designated as the flying boat harbor of the city, although it was little used.

The seaplane which I saw was a new one of the HS type—the heavy old navy type equipped with a four hundred horsepower Liberty motor—made an easy landing, turned, and taxied toward the stage. The wind wasn't right for a nose-on landing, so the pilot swung into the wind and dropped his anchor over with his nearer wing not fifty feet from the float.

There were two men in the boat. One, the pilot, rose, looked toward the stage, saw me and the rowboat and gesticulated vigorously.

Then I realized that he was waving at me, but before I moved, he shouted angrily:

"Speed it up, Gorman! What's the matter with you?"

On impulse, I dropped into the rowboat, cast loose the moorings and shoved off. A stroke or two of the oars brought me alongside the seaplane.

THE pilot replaced his leather coat with a brown overcoat of fine wool and his helmet with a fedora. Then without another word he stepped into the rowboat. His companion followed. Somewhat amused by the whole thing, I gravely rowed them ashore. The pilot turned to me and said sharply:

"Well, where's the car?" Then, before I could speak, he had looked toward one edge of the field and spotted a dark blue limousine, heavy and luxurious. "All right, I see it."

But he did not go toward it at once; instead, he stood looking at me for a moment. I looked back at him.

He was a tall, big-framed man of about thirty, somewhat dark in coloring, with an air of authority about him. Without getting poetical, I can safely say that he had more the look of an eagle about him than any other flying man I'd ever seen, and I've seen some.

Have you ever carefully surveyed an eagle, other than the kind they put on coins? Well, he's not the sort of bird you'd like the children to play with. That beak of his is made for tearing, and those angry eyes for spotting prey. And this man had the beak and the keen eyes—ice cold when they weren't flaming fury. In color you'd call them gray.

And he had a jaw with fight and determination in it, too, and a mouth that curled up at the corners from smiling too much. But it wasn't the kind of a mouth that smiles with you. Yes, taking him all in all, I disliked that cynical mouth of his more than I did anything else. In short, he was an interesting lad to meet on a dull Saturday afternoon in New York.

Strangely enough, I found myself comparing him to me. He'd outweigh me by perhaps twenty pounds, and he was an inch taller, at least. There was plenty of decision in his movements, but how fast he could move was something I couldn't judge, then.

On his companion I wasted very little time. He was a big husky, bigger than the other man, but of an entirely different type, for he was roughneck, through and through. That was obvious, although he was

clad in a complete outfit of fairly expensive clothes.

His attire set me thinking; the hard-looking customer who had been knocked out by the ball had also been stuffed into a new suit. I realized that the money for them doubtless came from the same source; and that the fellow who stopped the ball was Gorman, the man I was mistaken for.

"Well, when you've finished looking me over," said the pilot and he smiled that mocking, unreal smile of his. "You've got your instructions?"

I didn't open my mouth and consign him and his instructions to hades, although that was what I felt like doing. A desire to play this part a little longer possessed me—anything to rinse out of my mouth the poisonous taste of the Central Park bridle path. I looked at him dully. He laughed petulantly, and then addressed me as if I were a child.

"I'm Grier, Owen Grier, you know, the man who hired you through Stokes and gave you that suit of clothes. I'll have something to say to Stokes, by the way, about picking men. Well, never mind that. We're bringing Mr. Masterson, the man we're interested in, back in that car and we're going to take him on board the plane. He'll come willingly. You just keep your mouth shut, as you have been doing, and row us out. If there should be any trouble—well, you do just what I tell you to do, and do it fast. Comprehend?"

I nodded. "If there should be any trouble," he had said, and his eyes had seemed to flicker red when he said it. And "Masterson." Could that be the Masterson Milly would be "very, very happy" with? I wondered. Not likely.

"After we've gone, take the boat back and forget about it. We'll be able to manage the rest without your intelligent assistance. See?"

I nodded again, somehow disappointed that the part I had stolen in this affair was to be so small. But I decided to stay and see this Masterson.

"That's all. Come on, Belcher."

He walked rapidly away, keeping Belcher a little behind him and cleaving his way through the crowd of inquisitive boys as if walking through a field of grain. He entered the rear door of the limousine, while Belcher took the wheel.

CHAPTER III

THE FLIGHT

AFTER I got my pipe lighted, I considered the situation. Here was a gentleman with a bad eye, skilled in the matter of handling a seaplane, who had purchased complete outfits of clothes for at least two ruffians, and who was bringing back to his seaplane a man named Masterson, from whom he anticipated trouble. That sounded like quite a party.

I looked at the ship, spruce in battleship gray paint, with that capable looking Liberty perched between her wings. She was not more than fifty feet from me, and yet she might as well have been fifty miles. I was a comparison clerk. Flying boats were not for me. Those days were over.

And as soon as I had reached that gloomy conclusion I did my usual right-about face. Flying boats *were* for me; at least this one would be until I was a little clearer in mind as to what Owen Grier was up to. Call it impulse, spring fever, natural foolishness, anything you want. I knocked out my pipe.

"Come here, son," I said to a sandy-haired lad of fifteen who was

staring at the seaplane. "Can you row a boat?"

He could after a fashion, and I had him take me out and put me aboard her, with orders to tie up the rowboat at the stage, when he had done so. I looked her over. The gunner's cockpit in the bow was there unchanged, save that no machine gun was mounted on a ring. There was a canvas cover over it. The rest of the boat hull had been changed somewhat, so that there were seats for four people, one beside the pilot, and two in front of him.

WITHOUT any compunctions I picked up the leather jacket Grier had discarded and went through the pockets. I found nothing but a neat little blackjack, springy in the handle, with quite a hunk of lead in the business end. Any crook would have been proud to own it.

That made up my mind for me. I tucked it back in the pocket and went up to the gunner's cockpit, which was cut off from the rest of the plane by a partition. I got in, sat down on the bottom, and pulled the canvas cover over it again. All this, of course, was in plain view of curious ones on shore, but it's been my experience that if you do a thing in a matter-of-fact way nobody will question you, no matter what queer thing you do. Doubtless they thought I was taking a nap.

I was cramped in that cockpit and I neither could see shore nor hear what was going on there. I got out my knife and amused myself in making a peephole that would show me the interior of the hull. I had finished this desecration of Grier's property when I heard a boat bump alongside.

"Where my boatman went I can't understand, Mr. Masterson, but we can manage without him," Grier's smooth voice was saying. There was an undercurrent of irritation and something else in it, but it was well below the surface. "I'm something of an oarsman myself."

"So I see, Mr. Grier," replied another voice—a rather weak one, but purposely lowered in pitch, as by a man who wants to make or maintain an impression.

"But this is the new starter I am drawing your attention to, sir," Grier went on.

I looked through my peephole in a hurry. I had glanced over the ship and had noticed she had a standard type of electric starter in her. But there Grier was, pointing it out as if he were showing off a new baby. I felt a decided drop in spirits. Was Grier merely a confidence man? I looked over Masterson, the man he had picked as victim, and felt that it was probably so. I couldn't decide whether he was my Millicent's accepted suitor. Masterson was a youngish young man — perhaps twenty-four, with light hair, fair complexion, and regular good-looking features, with not enough good solid bone outlined beneath the skin of his face to give him any appearance of resolution or determination. His clothes were dark in color and formal in cut. It was easy to size him up, taking that deepened voice into consideration. Just a boy with lots of money—too much—trying to play the man of affairs. Wall Street is full of them. Maybe he was the man whose horse I had borrowed that night in the park. I never looked at that chap.

"To a man of your perspicacity such a starter as this, with features that give it an overwhelming advantage over every other now on the market, is a matter that merits s e r i o u s consideration, especially since my confrères and I can finance

it adequately ourselves and desire merely the weight of your name behind it."

THAT was Grier, running on in a voice that dripped deference.

"Belcher, haul up that anchor," he commanded, and I sank lower in the cockpit. I had forgotten that infernal mudhook. Did they store it in that front cockpit?

They didn't. I heard Belcher grunt as he pulled it in, and then he thumped it down in the passenger compartment, within a foot of my peephole.

"Now we are at the mercy of wind and current, drifting," Grier said, waving his hand dramatically toward the Jersey shore. "Should the starter fail we would be in a serious predicament. But no! It will not fail." By now he was in his leather coat, and in the pilot's seat.

"You understand that I don't care to take a flight, don't you?" Masterson interrupted, and his voice was now high and somewhat apprehensive.

"Absolutely, Mr. Masterson," Grier assured him, fairly cooing. "We will merely start the motor. Bend down, sir, and observe this pedal."

I was puzzled, but as young Masterson bent to look at the pedal, the game they were playing became apparent in a flash. For as the youthful financier leaned over, Belcher, who had been standing behind him, moved his wrist sharply, and a blackjack thudded gently on Masterson's head. He slumped to the bottom instantly.

"Neat work, Belcher," said Owen Grier.

And all this with thousands, lining the Drive, staring at that boat! Belcher's body and the side of the boat had screened the thing from them.

That was my cue to start something; I realized that, but even as I got to my knees and prepared to come through the canvas Grier started the motor and gave her the gun. Instantly the boat moved ahead, bumping and surging over the surface under the impulse of that four hundred horse Liberty. I sat down again.

My one chance against those two was surprise, for I was unarmed, and you can't launch a surprise attack in a boat that's bouncing and jolting and shooting along at sixty miles an hour or so. I'd be chucked around the compartment like a man standing on a bucking horse. That meant I'd have just about as much chance of landing even one straight punch with steam behind it as a man rolling downstairs would have of threading a needle. Oh, no; you can award the hero's medal to somebody else if you like; I just sat still.

IT wasn't until Grier had actually gotten her off the water and was banking around to turn down river again that I could take another look through the peephole without scraping half the side of my face off. Tinted goggles shielded those piercing eyes of his. There was a frown on his face, as if he wasn't satisfied with his coup. But it disappeared almost at once, smothered under the grimace of that mocking smile. Belcher, stolid as an ox, was sitting in the seat beside him, and in the hull lay the unconscious Masterson.

I couldn't make another peephole in the bow of the boat, for that was thick and solid construction beyond the strength of my penknife to pierce, so all I could do was to guess at our direction. I took the time by my watch, which had a luminous dial, so I could roughly figure our distance from New York.

I reckoned the speed of the boat

at about seventy miles an hour. It wasn't until twenty minutes had elapsed that anything happened. Then I saw Masterson stir, roll over and sit up. He put his hands to the back of his head, and then, suddenly realizing that something had happened to him, looked around.

Grier pulled his lips back to show his teeth in a laugh, and Belcher, taking his cue from his master, grinned briefly. Masterson stared at them for a time and then up at the motor behind them, that was kicking up such a terrific clamor. That told him he was in the air, and he crawled on his hands and knees a step to the side of the boat and put his head up. He jerked it down as the terrific blast of the air struck it, but put it up again cautiously and looked over the side.

I couldn't see his face for he was looking almost backward, but he collapsed in the boat again as if the sight had been too much for him. That reminded me of the lad whose mare I had borrowed. Neither Grier nor Belcher paid any more attention to him, save that once, when he edged toward them, as if to shout something, Belcher doubled up his huge fist and drew it back threateningly. Masterson retreated hastily.

The flight lasted fifty-seven minutes. By the time it was over I had figured out, through shadows and sun in the compartment, that we had been flying in an easterly direction. That meant we'd either gone up over the Sound or were down on the south shore of Long Island. You don't fool around over land much in a flying boat.

As I saw Grier and Belcher both looking ahead and over the side, and later saw Grier move the wheel for a spiral, I knew we were coming down. As I figured it, my best move was to lie low until they had left the flying boat with Masterson, and then sneak out and follow, or jump them, or give the alarm, according to what seemed most likely.

I couldn't plan more than that, for I had no idea where we were landing. Grier set the ship on the water without much of a jounce, and then taxied along, cutting the motor after a quick glance ahead. I felt the hull slide up on a gradually sloping beach and then come to a stop.

"You take Masterson ashore, Belcher," Grier commanded, "I'll look after the anchor."

"Come on, you," Belcher growled, grabbing Masterson by the arm. A torrent of language poured out of the young fellow's throat—threats, questions, orders, and pleas. "Shut up!" Belcher answered, accompanying his command by that threatening backward gesture of his fist. Masterson dodged involuntarily, and his voice died away.

I lay quiet, waiting for the thud of the anchor in the sand when Grier tossed it overboard. I never heard it. For while I still had my eye to the hole, the canvas cover was suddenly ripped off the top of the cockpit; the light flooded in on me, and a sharp pain went stabbing through my head.

CHAPTER IV

CHRIS DUNSTON

WHEN I came to, not very long afterward, I suppose I went through the same motions as Masterson, for the thing that ailed me was precisely what had ailed him—a good brisk tap on the skull. Grier had simply snatched off that canvas and reached in the cockpit with his jack.

Yes, my head was sore, but that was nothing to the pain my sensibilities were suffering. Here I had been contemptuously pitying young Mas-

terson for letting a bad one like Grier put it over on him, and now I was precisely in the same class.

As soon as I could collect my senses, I sized up the situation. I was lying on the floor of a medium-sized room, bare, save for several folded army cots and some unpainted kitchen chairs. It was cold. There were windows on two sides and a closed door on each of the other sides. The windows were closed, too, and boards had been nailed across them at intervals outside the glass.

Sitting on the edge of a chair not three feet from my head, and gazing at me with horror in his eyes, was young Masterson. I rested a bit, until things seemed more normal to me, and then I sat up. Masterson started violently to his feet as I moved.

"What's the matter?" I asked, for my temper had not been improved by that enforced nap. "Haven't you ever seen a man come out of it after a knock on the head? I have—very recently."

He didn't see the joke. "Who are you—and what is all this? Why have I been carried off in this—this outrageous manner?" he burst out. "I must get back at once!"

I rummaged in my pockets.

They had left me my pipe and tobacco, although my change, my penknife and the slender roll of four ten-dollar bills—my honorarium for that week—were gone. I stuffed my pipe and lit up.

"My name's Chris Dunstan," I said. "Your name's Masterson, and you're a poor judge of starters. That's all I know about this affair."

"But what—" he began, looking at me as if I had engineered the whole thing.

"Wait a moment," I cut him off. "I'm going to ask a few questions. How did you happen to run into this man Grier?"

"He came to my office several days ago with a letter of introduction from an unimpeachable source, and explained that he'd like to have the backing of my name—he didn't want any money—in a company to manufacture a remarkable new electric starter."

"I suppose your father was the late J. A. S. Masterson?" I hazarded. J. A. S. was a hard customer, but a good deal of a man at that, and he had more dollars than most people have imagination.

He nodded proudly. "I am Jeremy Todd Masterson," he explained.

That settled it. This was the man my girl was engaged to. I grunted. So far Jeremy Todd Masterson hadn't scored heavily with me.

"And so you came up to the seaplane to inspect the starter in person this afternoon and saw stars instead." I completed his story for him. "Good! When you looked over the side during the flight did you see where we were heading?"

"Yes. We were flying down the south shore of Long Island just inside the barrier beaches."

"And where are we now?"

"Somewhere among the dunes on Fire Island, I believe. After the boat landed, that beast Belcher led me in here, and later he and another man carried you in."

I nodded. "Fire Island's a nice, deserted sort of place at this time of year, and this is an empty shack, concealed from ocean and bay sides by the dunes, I suppose."

"You don't seem to mind it," he burst out resentfully. "I tell you, I *must* get away from here at once!"

"I'll mind it when the time comes for that," I said. "Meanwhile, I'm endeavoring to get back to my status *quo ante* that crack on the head, and there's nothing like a pipe to soothe the raging spirit."

HE surged around the room, stopping to bang on both the doors and to tap on the windows.

"Don't break that glass," I told him. "I have an idea we're going to be here some time, and it'll be colder than this tonight."

He didn't answer, but banged on the doors again. Quite unexpectedly one of them, the one leading to the front hall, opened, and Owen Grier came in, smiling that wide, toothsome smile of his, but looking us both over with a sharp glint in his eyes.

I said nothing and kept right on smoking. After all, it was up to him to do the talking. But Masterson pressed up to him, babbling the same queer mixture of questions and threats that he had tried on Belcher. Grier laid his hand gently on the young man's chest and pushed.

Masterson went reeling backward until his feet struck a cot. Then he went down with a crash. Grier whirled to face me, but I was right where I had been, sitting on the floor with my pipe between my teeth. The pipe wasn't tasting very good just then, for the after effects of that blow on the skull have a way of taking the flavor out of the best smoke, but I didn't see anything else to do.

"So," said Grier with a pleased smile, as his eyes lighted on the bump on the top of my head. "You are contemplating the evil result of interfering in my affairs. Did you think I wouldn't know there was a man in the bow cockpit by the nose-heaviness of the boat?"

I didn't say anything. His face darkened suddenly and he moved forward in a swift glide. When he spoke, he thrust his head threateningly toward mine, but as I was on the floor, he couldn't get it close enough for the effect he planned.

"I know you're not Gorman," he snarled. "Stokes told me that. Who are you and what made you thrust yourself into this game?"

"My name's Christopher Dunstan," I answered and I tried to keep my voice quite unmoved, even bored. The more I could worry this gentleman the better I'd feel. "And I'm like the man in the funeral; I didn't know the corpse, I just came for the ride."

"A humorist, eh?" he said, straightening up and resuming that air of mocking lightness that he affected. I gave him credit for very quickly perceiving the futility of trying to frighten me like a twelve-year-old. "Well, perhaps we will make you better acquainted with the corpse before the funeral is over."

"That's better," I said. "You know, when you were pushing your face at me as if it were something frightful, I was beginning to fear I might dislike you."

"You may have cause to before long," he retorted. "But since you're in this, you'll stay in." He turned to Masterson, who had gotten up and was staring apprehensively at him.

"Well, Masterson, I suppose you want to know what this is all about."

"I do," Masterson now replied. "And——"

"Quiet!" snapped Grier. "Perhaps you may remember that your marriage to Miss Millicent Raconsby Pearse takes place on Monday?"

Masterson didn't say anything, but I could see his throat swell as he struggled with his voice. At last he nodded his head.

"Well, it doesn't unless a certain condition is fulfilled."

"So that's it!" Masterson burst out. "That's what all this——"

"Yes, yes," Grier broke in, his voice soothing, with just a little touch of sardonic amusement in it. That's what it's all about. And aren't you interested in the condition?"

"What is it?" demanded Masterson. He was firming up, now that

some of the mystery was clearing away.

"That little packet of Liberty bonds your uncle sent as a wedding present—though why anyone should send two young Crœsuses like you and Miss Pearse bonds is beyond me—that packet will never be missed in the midst of that lavish display of wedding presents, will it? That's all we want, and we've made arrangements to facilitate your getting it for us."

"You want—there's a hundred thousand dollars in it!" gasped Masterson. His eyes bulged as he mentioned the figure.

"A trifle more. They're over par," Grier agreed complacently. "That's all. Refuse and we'll keep you here until Monday night. And then—oh, no, we won't kill you. That would be crude. We'll just feed you a little ether, take you to the city, and leave you in a Ninth Avenue joint Belcher knows of, with your fingers around a bottle and alcohol sprinkled all over you."

MASTERSON blinked. He didn't quite get the picture, so Grier with real enjoyment in his ironical voice went on:

"Imagine the consternation when you fail to appear at home this evening—mother wild, uncle frantic, fiancée prostrated. Discreet inquiries at the office—you left with a gentleman—a bottle is found in your desk—I left it there. No news tomorrow or Monday—and then Monday night you're found—by a reporter who will be tipped off—in a disgusting state of intoxication. Think of the front page stories next morning."

"Don't you think I could tell them what really happened, and make you suffer in jail for this?" Masterson raged.

Grier laughed. "I can just picture you telling it. A villain decoys you onto a flying boat and abducts you, holds you for ransom, and so forth. Why, that sort of thing doesn't happen nowadays, Masterson, except in the brain of a young gentleman who goes on a spree that lasts three days and breaks up his wedding."

"I'd have proof; those people at the seaplane base——"

"Those people at the seaplane base didn't see any rough stuff, not a bit," Grier said. "They saw three men go on board a flying boat. That's all. No; you'd better come through, Masterson."

"He'd be a witness for me," said Masterson, turning to look at me.

"Not at all," replied Grier cheerfully. That gentleman's going on a long cruise on a rum runner just as soon as I can arrange it. And by the time he's gotten back, and you've gotten your other proof together, people will have forgotten everything except that you drank yourself out of matrimony. Do you think Miss Pearse is going to believe your story after she's been humiliated in the eyes of the whole world?"

Masterson abruptly left that part of the discussion. I wanted badly to get up and squash Grier's mouth for mentioning Miss Pearse. It was for her sake I didn't.

CHAPTER V

WITHOUT A STRUGGLE

"I COULDN'T possibly get you the bonds, anyhow," Masterson said. "My uncle has them in his safe deposit box. And that can't be opened except by him on Monday morning."

"On the contrary," replied Grier, unmoved, "we know that they are in your hands at your residence and that you can get hold of them whenever you please. You simply telephone your secretary—I forget his name—that you are sending a mes-

senger, with a note from you, to take the bonds around to Miss Pearse's home. We'll supply the telephone and also the trustworthy messenger."

"I tell you they're not at home!" asserted Masterson, and for the first time he showed some real force. "They're in a time-locked vault downtown."

"Nonsense!" replied Grier. "Do you think I went into this thing blindly? I *know* they're at your town house.

"Aren't you in love with Millicent Pearse? Do you want someone else to walk in and grab her heart on the rebound?"

Masterson reddened suddenly. "That fellow hardly knows her," he said hotly. "He's just been inflicting himself upon Miss Pearse recently and she's too kind-hearted to forbid him to ride with her."

That interested me. Masterson knew of me, if he didn't know me by sight. Obviously Grier didn't know me.

Grier smiled with a maddening air of superior knowledge. "Perhaps you're right," he murmured softly, "But there's another gentleman also, I believe, that you know nothing about. A dashing fellow." His manner changed suddenly and he looked briskly at his watch.

"I'll give you half an hour to think it over. If you agree, we'll rig up some reassuring little explanation of why you won't be home tonight, and tomorrow we'll send for the bonds. Of course, if you try to double-cross us, we can twist around to make it appear that you were just far enough along in your spree to remember to make an excuse for your sudden disappearance."

"You—you'll bitterly repent this," Masterson declared, his voice quivering with rage and helplessness.

Grier laughed derisively. "I never was good at repentance," he said lightly. "Do *you* think I'll repent this?" he asked, turning to me.

"No, but I think you'll expiate it," I replied. "By the way, I believe you said you were going to give us a respite from your company for half an hour?"

He didn't like that.

"I see I'll have to teach you manners before long," he growled. "I can do it; never fear."

HE swung on his heel and went out. As he shut the door I listened intently. I could hear the sliding noise of a wooden or metal bar dropping into place. It was quite plain that he had made preparations for holding a prisoner for some time in this ramshackle bungalow.

Masterson flung himself down in a chair, head resting on his hands, and dejectedly contemplated his difficulties.

"That was a good move, saying that the bonds were in a safe deposit box," I said, in a tone that wouldn't reach a listener behind the door. "Keep it up. You may be able to convince him it's the truth."

He looked at me hopelessly. His voice was choky when he spoke:

"It *is* the truth. That's just where those bonds are—in my uncle's box in the safe deposit vault downtown."

I whistled. "Thought you were throwing a bluff, and a good one," I said.

"Do you think I would hesitate a minute to pay him a hundred thousand dollars to get out of this terrible predicament?" he demanded.

"What!" I said. "You mean that you'd knuckle down to that crooked, conceited, evil-eyed gentleman without a struggle?"

"What can we do against them?" he asked mournfully. "There are three of them, armed, and we are two, unarmed and locked in. Oh,

why did I ever let him induce me to go on board that flying boat?"

CHAPTER VI

SPIKES AND SCREWS

I DIDN'T say a word. It was rather flabbergasting, you know, to hear that spineless wail from a man you had to depend upon in a tight place. For it was a tight place.

Strictly, it wasn't any of my business; I'll admit that, but I'd rather have been sliced into little pieces and fed to the eels in Great South Bay than see this man Grier, with the eagle's beak and the devil's own eye, win that game.

It may have been a private fight, but I never did win any encomiums for my politeness, and I had horned into it, from my large and not so shapely feet up to the little knob that now adorned my cranium. Besides, if Milly wanted Masterson, I couldn't permit him to be annoyed by Grier and his little game. I'd bring him back to her, of course, and as soon as I could.

Masterson began to indulge a talking streak.

"Just think of the scandal," he mourned. "I've never been in a scandal. Despite all my wealth and social position, I've escaped the mud they're so eager to throw. I'll be laughed at, jeered, pilloried in the papers! Why, I'll have to leave the city."

IT might not be so cheery for Milly, either, I reflected, as he continued his lament. It was quite apparent that he was telling the truth about the location of those bonds. If he could have gotten hold of them, he'd have crawled on his hands and knees to hand them over to Grier. I didn't suffer intensely concerning his predicament, but there was Milly to think about. She intended to marry him.

"Look here," I said, keeping my voice down, but trying to put some scrappy spirit into it, nevertheless, "since you can't surrender, you've got to fight. If you don't, all this scandal you've been wailing about will break forth and you'll go round wreathed with the poison ivy of gossip and plastered with the mud of misdoing."

"But how can two unarmed——"

"You said that before," I answered. "That's what I'm going to find out—how two unarmed, imprisoned, *etceteraed* unfortunates can either beat or give the slip to three great, massive, armed desperadoes who are ready to chew them up on the least provocation."

That stung him a little.

"I cannot help being impressed with the hopelessness of the situation," he muttered shamefacedly.

"All right, but don't impress me with it," I said.

"Look here, Masterson, if you don't take a brace and crash through before you're due at the altar, you'll have that girl of yours turning you down for somebody with more marrow in his backbone. Who is this 'someone,' anyhow?"

"He's nothing but an interloper, a nobody," Masterson burst out angrily. I don't even know his name, and I don't for a moment consider him worth a thought. Miss Pearse has several close friends, but she——"

"I believe every word of it," I said, "but don't forget that a woman left as you will leave her, practically at the church door, is apt to do something rash. You've got to be there. Now favor me with a little silence while I see what brains and tobacco can do for us."

I reconnoitered. They had done a good job on those windows. In the

first place, the panes had been nailed and screwed down, so that the glass would have had to be broken to get at the boards outside. And the boards, as well as I could make out, were held in place by a fine assortment of spikes and screws. The other door was firmly fastened, and probably hopeless, too. Grier had prepared his coop well.

You see, it wasn't a matter of getting out—the chairs and cots as battering rams would do it in a very few minutes. The job was to get out without making any noise that could be heard in the next room, and that seemed impossible.

As soon as we started anything like a break-away noise, the three could come in and bend guns on us, or blackjacks over our heads, and we'd be through without having accomplished a thing.

THERE remained the matter of a surprise attack, rushing Grier when he entered and putting him out, and then taking on the others with whatever he happened to be carrying in the weapon line to help us. That didn't seem at all hopeless to me, and it was a pleasing thought, too, the idea of tackling Owen Grier.

I had noticed when he came in that first time he had carefully located us both in the room in non-combattant positions and that despite his easy air he had kept his hands quite close to or in his coat pockets all the time. That meant weapons—his blackjack in one, and probably, from the sag of his coat, an automatic in the other.

It was quite apparent that he was hard-boiled, and not playing this game for the fun of it. And although I felt sure that Grier wouldn't hurt Masterson because that double-jointed, wabbly spine of his made it unnecessary to go to such an extreme, he didn't look upon me as being quite so innocuous.

That may be vain, but it's what I felt. And I hadn't the least desire to be killed, even reluctantly, by Grier. No, it wouldn't do to underestimate him, and it would be quite a stunt to break through. But it wasn't hopeless.

"Look here," I said, tapping Masterson on the shoulder to arouse him from the fit of blues in which he had submerged himself, "when Grier opens that door I'm going to grab him, and hold him so he can't move. I want you to reach in his right coat pocket and get his gun. Then follow my lead."

"You—you mean you're going to attack him?" Masterson asked, and his pale blue eyes bulged as if somebody was inflating them with an air pump.

"That's it, precisely. You're good at arithmetic. This is a case of two against one, isn't it? Well, then, don't be afraid. Just grab that automatic and pass it to me. But be quick. Then follow me out."

"But—but——" he spluttered.

"That's all you have to do," I said. "Just follow me out. How was the tide when we landed, coming in or going out?"

"I d-don't know. Why?"

"If that seaplane's aground two men can't budge her. In that case we'll run down the beach and make a stand behind a dune. After that, well, there ought to be a coast guard station somewhere around here on the ocean side."

He was going to say something else, then, but I heard somebody at the door and jumped to the wall beside it. I flattened myself out, and waited tensely. I don't know what Masterson did, for all my faculties were concentrated on the spot where Grier would stand when the door swung.

The bar was withdrawn. Then the door opened. I jumped. My arms

went around the intruder's body just above the belt, pinning both arms to his sides. He was helpless.

"Grab it!" I bellowed.

My head was over the pinioned man's shoulder. Masterson danced into sight, waving his hands in frantic excitement but making no effort to close in.

"It isn't Grier!" he shrieked. "It isn't Grier!"

The man I held was straining in my grip, and I felt his knee going up for a kick. I released him suddenly, and swung my right fist up to his chin. He didn't have a chance; down he went in a heap. I saw it was Belcher as he dropped.

"Come on!" I yelled, and shot out of the door. We had lost time by Masterson's hesitation. I couldn't wait to search Belcher for a gun; I'd be covered from outside before I could draw it.

AS I went through the doorway two men closed in on me from either side. I was moving fast, but their clutching hands held, and down all three of us went. There was a confused scuffle on the floor, and I managed to fight my way up to my knees. Then, from behind me, somebody dived on me full length, knocking me flat again.

My breath was gone, and when I'd gotten together enough air and will power to heave up under that weight, I found an automatic muzzle not a foot from my forehead.

Grier was holding it, on his knees, his face contorted with hate, yet with that grin curling back his lips. Another fellow, a thin, long-faced lad with a yellow skin, was climbing slowly to his feet on the other side of me.

"Better quit it," Grier snarled. "I'm in deep and I'm not afraid to shoot."

He meant it. Strange how a little scrap will arouse the killing lust in some men. I didn't move a muscle.

"You win, temporarily," I said.

"Get back in that room, both of you," he commanded. I turned my head. The mystery of the third man in that scrimmage was revealed. It wasn't Belcher, who had recovered from that upppercut almost instantaneously; it was Masterson. He had come running after me, blind as a runaway horse, and fallen full length on my rising form. I didn't say anything. What was the use?

Back we went into the room. Belcher was sitting up, his eyes still somewhat vacant. That was comforting; at least I'd gotten in one good blow.

Grier followed us, and stood in the doorway, his automatic in his hand. He motioned to the reviving Belcher to get out. He did, after turning a nasty eye on me. Then Grier gloated. I never saw a man enjoy himself more than he did at that time. His eyes glistened, his chest broadened, and he waved his automatic about as if it had been a whip.

"Rather dull of you, Dunstan, to imagine that I'd walk into your little trap," he said with an exultant laugh. "The first time it was safe to come in, but the second — no, indeed. So I sent friend Belcher in to try your mettle, and I must say you were severe with him."

CHAPTER VII

ON GRIER'S ACCOUNT

BY THAT time I'd recovered my breath, I decided that if Grier wanted to admire himself I'd let him, for a man who is deeply impressed with his own talents is apt to underestimate other people's.

"Yes, it wasn't very bright," I admitted. "But I thought—"

"You thought I wasn't very bright, either? Is that it?"

"You can put it that way," I said shortly, as if I was much chagrined.

That pleased him a lot. He dismissed me from the situation with a contemptuous smile and turned fiercely on Masterson.

"Have you decided to be sensible?" he asked.

"If I only could convince you that those bonds are in the safe deposit box!" Masterson moaned. He pushed his long, sandy-colored hair back off his forehead and then made an imploring gesture. "I—I didn't want to try this foolish attempt to escape," he wailed. "*He* made me do it. I knew we would fail!"

IT was right there that I decided that as far as I was concerned Masterson could rot in that bungalow. It would be a low trick on any girl to rescue that pup in time for her to marry him. But of course that didn't mean I was through with Owen Grier. He couldn't get the bonds, for they were beyond his reach. But he could get a good sound thrashing, and I promised myself the pleasure of administering it—or of putting up a mighty hard try at it, anyhow. It may sound low down, but from then on I was in the game on Grier's account, not to rescue Masterson. I couldn't twist my conscience around to see saving that spaghetti-backboned weakling as a virtue.

Grier showed his teeth. "You are a man of brain, if not of backbone, Masterson," he said. "Now if you'll just change your mind about the location of those bonds we'll have you back in New York in time for the theatre tonight. But don't let me hurry you. I can wait."

He backed out of the doorway and closed the door. Masterson promptly retreated to the other side of the room and gazed at me like a dog that anticipates a beating.

"It wasn't my fault that I knocked you down," he whimpered. "You *told* me to follow you out, you know."

"All right; you're safe," I answered. Then I sat down on one of the kitchen chairs and took out my pipe. Fortunately it was still intact, although it had been in my coat pocket during the whole scrimmage. I still had some luck left.

EXCLUDING from my ears a monologue on trouble, delivered by Masterson, I looked over the room again. It was certainly a ramshackle place, not well built in the beginning, and rapidly disintegrating under the winds and damp from the sea and the blistering heat of the sun.

The floor was of wide boards and under one window they were warped decidedly, as if rain had streamed in on them and swelled them until they buckled up. I got down on my hands and knees and examined it. It looked to me very much like an exit. The clever Mr. Grier had overlooked something—perhaps.

I borrowed a leg and a rung from one of the kitchen chairs and propped it against the wall. Masterson stopped talking and gazed at me in fascination as you look at a man who is about to do a high dive into a tank. I paid no attention to him, for I had to work and keep an ear peeled for anyone at the door.

After a little experimenting I found that it was possible to pry up a board without making too much noise, provided that I talked to Masterson during the operation. As soon as I had one up I bent the nails flat and put it back again.

"You'll be caught, sure," he warned me in a whisper.

"If you can't be more optimistic than that, don't talk at all," I growled, getting the chair leg un-

der the corner of another board. "Why——"

I stopped. To my ears had come the sound of a motor. It was not muffled, and at first I thought it was the roar of the flying boat. But it wasn't loud enough or rapid enough for the pulsation of a twelve cylinder Liberty. It couldn't be an automobile in that sandy waste; it must be a motorboat.

Masterson listened, too.

"That must be the speed boat that was anchored beside the flying boat," he ventured.

CHAPTER VIII

ALTITUDE

IT WAS news to me that the gang had a boat as well as a seaplane. They were certainly well organized for this little trick. Who was in the speed boat? One of our three jailers, certainly. Where he was going was a matter of speculation. It might be for food or water, in which case it would probably be either Stokes or Belcher, or it might be another move in the game, which would mean Grier was leaving us. I didn't want Grier to go. I'd much prefer to have him around where I could lay my hands on him.

By the time I had ripped up enough boards to let me through the floor it was growing dark. The cross-beams that supported the flooring were wide enough apart so that I could slip down in between them. Through I went, and found myself on the sand beneath the house. The bungalow rested upon a foundation of ship's timbers, great, thick pieces that were sunk halfway into the sand. I would have to tunnel under these.

Masterson came to the edge of the hole I had made.

"I'm coming with you," he announced in a whisper, leaning over and gazing down at me. "I wouldn't care to be found here after you'd gone."

"Come ahead," I replied somewhat shortly. "Only stay up there and make a noise once in a while until I get a hole scooped out under this beam."

I worked on in silence. It wasn't hard, scraping the sand out around the timber and pushing it behind me, but it took time. The twilight was almost over when I finally dug upward on the other side of the foundation and the fine, dry sand on the surface gave way and collapsed into the hole beneath it.

"Get ready to come," I murmured, sticking my head up through the flooring. "All clear in a minute."

I ducked down again, and then stiffened suddenly. Somebody was unbarring the door of the room.

"Drop!" I whispered sharply, but Masterson lost his nerve.

"It's too late, they'll catch me," he muttered, drawing back. "They might shoot! I'll pretend I'm asleep —don't know you've——"

I closed the debate by diving under the timber and scratching away at the sand that had caved into the hole. I was just squeezing through when I heard a shout from the room I had left.

I got to my feet and ran headlong through the loose sand and coarse grass, ready to jump sideways or drop at the sound of the first shot. But my speed and the gathering darkness shielded me, and I was probably out of sight before the men in the bungalow got to the door.

The side on which I had tunneled through was toward the ocean. As soon as I was sure I could not be seen, I circled around, heading for the bay, going as fast as I could run.

WHEN I sighted water I turned along the beach in the direction in which I figured the flying boat was

moored. I guessed right, and soon made it out in the darkness. It was some distance from shore, for the tide was up, and it was almost hidden by the gloom. The still water looked cold and somehow sinister in that light.

But Long Island bays aren't noted for their depths or danger and I splashed in and sloshed along toward the boat. I wasn't over my waist when I reached it.

With ears alert for sounds on shore I hauled the boat up to the anchor and then lifted it aboard. It wasn't until I had dropped the hook in the bottom of the boat that I heard them.

They had seen the movement of the seaplane as I pulled it up short, and they were shouting orders to each other. I heard a rattle of oars and realized they were jumping into a small boat I had overlooked. Then one of them, Belcher I think, shouted a command to stop.

An instant later, as I was pressing the starter button, he cut loose with his gun. There wasn't much danger that he would hit me, but I certainly jumped at the first shot. The sound of the thing coming across the water on that quiet night was terrific.

By that time I had the starter whirring, and an instant later the motor caught. Belcher was thundering away, emptying his automatic. I headed her out onto the bay and opened up the throttle. Taxiing along on the surface to warm up the engine, I did a little thinking. I was quite pleased that I had gotten away, and taken Grier's flying boat with me, but I wasn't any too certain I could get away with flying the thing.

Yes, I'd been in naval aviation, but I hadn't touched a wheel since 1919, and didn't know whether I'd have the feel of the air. I'd never flown that particular bus and didn't know her tricks, and it was a very black night. My feelings were mixed.

While I was nursing my nerve I figured out the situation ashore. It was obvious that Grier was the man who had left in the motor boat. The chase after me had been bungled, for lack of a leader. They had thought of the rowboat and seaplane too late.

And, too, I was sure I would have recognized Grier's voice. Again, I doubted that Grier would have cut loose with a gun or permitted Belcher to do so, since the chance of hitting me was small and the noise might possibly be heard quite a distance in that stillness and evoke investigation.

I didn't know where Grier had gone, but I knew that my best move was to get back to New York. I was cooling off, and coming to the reluctant conclusion that after all, even if I did despise Masterson, it was only the decent thing to tell Milly where he was and let her stir up the authorities. That would ruin Grier's plan and I could then devote some time to locating him. But I couldn't, in cold blood, bring myself to rescue that saphead for her.

I opened the throttle full and shot ahead. It was a great feeling, that—to be back at the wheel during a take-off, with the old boat surging through the water. The surface of the bay was infernally smooth and there was no wind at all to help, but the boat had no weight in her, so I soon got her up on her step. She bounced and dropped once or twice, and then I lifted her off, and held her up.

SHE picked up fast, and although I was gripping the wheel pretty tightly and working the silerons for every little roll, I was at least flying the old boat. I was wet to the waist and some cold. March is no time to go swimming and then up into the night air. But I did have a little glass windshield in front of me that saved my eyes from being blown into my head.

Taking it altogether, I hadn't a great deal to kick about, except that I was worried about finding Grier before the keen edge of my temper wore off.

I went after altitude, for I was still a bit skeptical about my own skill as a pilot. There's nothing like a couple of thousand feet of air under you when you make a slip. As soon as I got that much I fumbled around on the instrument board and luckily found a light. It felt good to see the altimeter, rev-meter, compass, air-speed, switches, and the other instruments, after flying it blind.

I had been heading it down the bay all this time, flying almost due west. Once up in the air at a decent height it wasn't so dark or so difficult to push her along.

The coast towns across the bay were lighting up, as well as some places ahead. Beyond them to the northwest was a glow of light, the great corona of New York.

I buzzed along over Long Beach and the Rockaways, and then swung around off Coney Island and roared up New York Bay, with the great blaze of the city turning the sky ahead yellow. It was about this time that my eye wandered to the gasoline gauge and I got a jolt. The needle pointed only a little above "empty."

That wasn't cheering, but after I had studied it out I didn't worry much. The motor was chewing up gasoline at about twenty to twenty-five gallons an hour, but by now I was passing the Statue of Liberty and my destination, 83rd Street, wasn't more than five or six minutes ahead of me. I ought to make it with a little gas to spare.

HOWEVER, I edged over to the New York pier-head line, so that if the motor should poop I could land and be within shouting distance of a dock. It was a needless precaution, for the motor thundered on as regular as a dollar watch, and soon, by dint of straining my eyes, I made out the dock stretching out into the river at 79th Street, with the seaplane harbor and yacht club beyond it.

There was still no wind, as far as I could judge, so I simply cut the motor and nosed down as close in to the float as I dared. For a man who'd been out of the game for years I didn't make such a frightful night landing, but my heart jumped higher than the boat when at last I let her bottom hit the water.

Not feeling much like another dip, I swung the boat close in to the landing-stage before I let go the anchor. Then I climbed along the wing and found that I could jump to the float.

I didn't waste any time looking for my overcoat, which I had left there only a few hours before. It would have come in handy, but I know that that thought had occurred to somebody else long ago. The playground was deserted, but I noticed Grier's limousine still standing where he had left it that afternoon. It had more locks on it than my coat.

CHAPTER IX

DECISIONS

I HOOFED it down to 79th Street and up the hill to Riverside Drive. There I ran into a policeman. He looked at my damp, wrinkled clothes fixedly.

"Officer, you're quite right; I have been drunk," I said. "But I'm not now, and I need a dime to get home to my family."

He growled indignantly, and pointed an accusing nightstick at me as he fumbled in his pocket. "Too many av you bums are getting onto the idea that a cop's the only safe fella to panhandle from. Take it and git off me beat."

I needed that dime badly for trans-

portation. As soon as I got over to Broadway, I plunged into a drug-store and in a telephone book located Milly's address.

No, I had never called on her. It was then only eight o'clock, so I decided to let her know what had happened to Masterson at once. I hopped into a bus that went by a transverse road through Central Park to the elegant Eighties, in the Fifth Avenue district.

The house, by its address, was only a few doors from the Fifth Avenue side and was surveying it for possible inquisitive special policemen when I came to a dead stop. I caught a glimpse of a man approaching me as he passed under a light—a tall man, walking with easy assurance. It was Grier!

Hastily I tucked my hands in my pockets, lowered my head, and adopted a shambling pace. I don't know why I did that, when my natural impulses should have been to charge upon him with a whoop, but I did. Under my hat brim I watched him narrowly as he drew nearer. He turned confidently in at a small three-story house of white stone, with a discreetly curtained and dimly illumined vestibule.

I slowed my pace even more, and when the butler opened the door I was almost in front of it. Grier greeted the man-servant curtly by name and stepped in as the man stood aside. It was quite apparent that he was known in that house, and probably was expected at that hour. And the number told me the house was the residence of Miss Millicent Raconsby Pearse!

I walked completely around the block without reaching any decision as to my course of action. Strange, very strange, that a criminal like Grier should be welcome in Milly's home. More mystery! I could ring the bell, push the servant aside, burst in upon Milly, assuming that she was in, and denounce Grier. But I had little hope that such an action would get me anywhere, especially since I hadn't the slightest idea what his game was. Masterson had not told me that Grier was acquainted with Milly; indeed, it had been quite apparent from the conversation in the bungalow that he did not know that himself.

I came abreast of the house again. It was one of those buildings in which the monotony of the white stone front is relieved by a series of slots, or insets, between each block of stone. And there was a tiny iron balcony on the second story, hardly more than a miniature rail about the large window. And the window was open a crack.

It looked like an opportunity. On impulse, after a quick glance around, I approached the house with stealthy steps, fitted my fingers into one of the depressions and climbed up to the balcony. It was almost as easy as climbing a ladder, and I was counting on the open window to relieve me from the embarrassment of an encounter with the burglar alarm system with which the house undoubtedly was equipped.

My pause on the sill outside the window to listen for sounds within was a perfunctory one, for the position was too dangerously exposed. However, I was lucky, for when I raised the sash and crept through, I found myself in a pleasant, book-filled chamber, softly illumined by a single lamp. I went to the door and listened intently.

THE murmur of voices at some distance reached me, and I ventured to slip out into the hall. At the head of the stairs I paused, and located the conversation as down on the ground floor. Repressing a thought that I was getting myself very deep into

something which might not turn out pleasantly, I tiptoed down the stairs and finally came to a halt beside some draperies at the entrance to a room on the right of the foyer. It was from that chamber that the voices came with an occasional crackle that told of a lighted fire within.

I listened intently, without any sense of shame. To listen was what I had come for, and my armor against shame was that my motives were entirely altruistic. Certainly Milly having dismissed me as she did, there was nothing in this for me.

There are better places to be than crouching inside a damp suit of clothes in a strange house filled with watchful servants and the deuce knows who else, in the most carefully policed section of the city. And I knew I couldn't explain faster than somebody else could shoot. However, it was my own fault.

The first words I could distinguish came to me in Milly's own voice, charmingly pitched in the middle register, with a precision of pronunciation pleasing because it was entirely natural.

"But, Owen, isn't it entirely my duty to stand by him all the more firmly if he is the victim of this hidden vice?" Owen! Then Milly knew Grier, knew him intimately. I had hardly recovered from this surprise when she went on:

"Drinking is almost always due to some unhappiness, some other trouble, and perhaps as his wife I could help Jeremy."

"You don't love him!" the voice of Owen Grier insisted, and there was now no mockery in it, but only a deadly intensity. "He is a weakling, a drunkard and a fool, and you are coming to realize this more and more daily. You've only seen him under the most favorable circumstances, when he was surrounded by people who deferred to him. How much of that deference was for Jeremy Todd Masterson, and how much merely for the son of J. A. S. Masterson? Have you ever seen him outside of the social or business world in which he was born a leader? Have you ever measured him as merely a man among other men?"

I stopped listening to think, for what I had heard was becoming more and more amazing. Owen Grier, whom I had considered only an unusual type of blackmailer out to extract a hundred thousand dollars from an easy victim, was much more than that. He must be a man of some standing in New York, and here he was pleading with Millicent Pearse as a lover pleads. And although he was now merely begging her not to marry Masterson, by inference he was asking her to marry him.

He had abducted Masterson to get him out of the way, apparently, while he blackened his character, not to extract money from him. Grier was no mean crook; he was a fortune hunter playing for the Pearse millions.

Suddenly, in a rush, came words from Owen Grier that I had anticipated.

"Milly, don't you see why I have come to you with this story? I am not a malicious tale bearer—I love you! And I must speak. I must beg you to tell me—is there no hope for me?"

He did not wait for her reply, but hurried on: "It is not too late. Come with me tonight—tomorrow—we will go away together, leaving Masterson to his excesses. You were made for me—and I—I am only part of a man, unless I have you."

THERE was a silence after that in the room of the crackling fire. I waited tensely, for perhaps here was the answer to that secret unhappiness of Milly. Would she yield to this adventurer's pleadings, confess that she

loved him, or remain true to the weakling Masterson? It was a sorry choice for any girl to make, but I was hoping that she would not take Owen Grier.

"You must realize how impossible all this is, Owen," the girl said, and her voice was firm and quite calm. "I have nothing beyond Jeremy's disappearance this afternoon, when he was to meet me, and your word concerning his habits."

"But you do not love him, you do not," he broke in, with a good imitation of the voice of a passionate lover. "Say that you do; you cannot!"

Milly was silent, and in that silence I read the truth of Grier's statement, which, strangely, was the same that I had made. She did not love Jerry Masterson; probably through some woman's instinct she had come to know him, despite the veils of his high position and reputation, for what he was. A son of J. A. S. Masterson, but he was weak where his father had been strong; cowardly instead of courageous; vain rather than confident. Then why was she marrying him? There was the mystery again.

"I know that you do not love him. But you do love me," Grier declared. "You have changed lately; you have turned away from Masterson."

"But I have not turned toward you, Owen Gregory," Milly said, and I could tell that she had risen to her feet. Gregory! Then Grier, in this abduction of his, had changed his name! That would explain why Masterson did not know him even by name as a friend of his fiancée, or of her family.

All this just flicked through the back of my mind; my whole conscious attention was on Grier's reply. He, too, had risen, and his first words revealed that he had realized from her clear, disdainful voice that in this part of his game he had fallen down heavily.

"All right," he said, with a resumption of that cynical manner of his, "if you want to marry a bank instead of a man——"

Right then I stepped into the room, for I hadn't bargained, in my eavesdropping, to hear Milly abused for any choice she may have decided to make. What I intended to do I don't know, but Grier settled my course of action for me.

I never said he wasn't fast, and when that devil of a temper of his burst its chains and came forth raving he was like a flicker of light.

He had an automatic in his hand before his surprised oath had left his lips, and if I hadn't majored in football during my two-year college career, he'd have put more lead in my head than I care to have in it. Murdering mad, he was.

MY tackle disconcerted him, besides spoiling his aim, and we went down together, taking a bridge lamp with us. The bulb popped in my ear, and for a second I thought he had started shooting wild. Dimly I heard shrieks.

I caught his right forearm and kept his elbow straight, so he couldn't bend the gun on me, while I tried to work my way up onto his chest. But it was no go.

He was off his back and onto his right side before I'd made much progress, and I felt as if I was riding a snake. He was able to slide me onto the floor. So there we lay, side by side, with me concentrating on his right forearm, while he struck and battered with his left hand and kicked as well as he could, which wasn't bad at all—for him. But it didn't bother me much, and when he started feeling for my eyes I buried my face in his coat.

He was properly raging, but his right arm was so weakened now that

I could hold his wrist with my left hand. My right was closing on the automatic. He made another desperate writhe, and contrived to twitch the automatic out of my grasp and his own. It landed somewhere outside the immediate battle front. As it fell he climbed to his knees and got one foot planted on the floor. I managed to beat him up, however, and had time for something I rarely indulge in—a good old-fashioned full arm swing that started far over in the hallway and kept right on going after it collided with his jaw.

He went shooting backward as if he were practising back flips off a springboard, and with the luck of a cross-eyed coyote he landed on top of a big leather easy chair. Of course, he continued to travel, but he took the chair with him, and that broke his fall.

Now I realize I've been knocking Grier, as I'll always call him, quite a bit, but in some ways he was quite a likable chap. For instance, as I stood there, looking at the overturned chair and confident that the fight was over, he got up, grabbed a heavy bronze book-end from somewhere, and let it fly at me. Still full of fight, he was, though that swing should have put a heavyweight pro out of the running.

I heard a shower of glass behind me, and more shrieks, and then Grier and I, both on the run, crashed together, tripped on the edge of a rug, and went down with a sound of more splintering furniture. Personally I landed on the floor, and it was hard.

We came up again together. Then we stood, face to face, too near each other for anything but short arm jabs. He hammered me pretty hard, and I'm willing to concede that his right to my nose was a good blow, and a tough one to get over. But I did get the edge on him in the slugging, and he proved it by leaping aside and reaching for something else—maybe the other book-end.

Before he could close on anything, I'd speculated on another swing. It got him in the chest, not quite where I'd planned it. But he went down just the same, this time in the fireplace and maybe on the fire.

Right there I learned that a hearth is a very bad place to throw a man onto, for he came back as if he had bounced, with a pair of heavy tongs in his hands. His face was like a mask of Satan, with hell's fires staring on either side of that beak nose.

It looked bad for me, but I helped him miss my head by an inch or so with a frantic duck, and of course I wasn't standing around congratulating myself and giving him another shot. I came in fast, and thrust for his chin, but the very force of the tongs' swing whirled him out of my reach, and I made a perfect miss. However, I was coming ahead fast, to get inside the next sweep, and my left wasn't so bad. He dropped the tongs and clinched.

Locked together, we staggered this way and that about the room, and I became aware of more screams. But I paid no heed, for my whole mind was fixed upon the blazing eyes that glared into mine, only inches away. I fought to get my right arm free; he clung to it with a tenacity that was highly complimentary and very heartening. Chairs crashed and overturned as we wavered and lunged. A table went down, and more furniture —I can't say what, but it shivered and clattered.

Then he made an error; he tried to get me with his knee. But I'd been in that kind of scrap before, and as he raised it I jerked away from him and caught the calf of his leg. That left me free, and he couldn't reach me. I shifted my grip to his ankle, and as he teetered on his other foot I saw fear leap into his eyes.

It's an easy matter to throw a man on his head once you have that grip, but just then I wanted Grier standing up. I pulled slowly on the leg, higher and higher, and he hopped desperately backward. Then I let go.

He saw me coming, and guarded, but my blow wasn't the swing he anticipated. It was a straight, full-arm jab, and it took him on the chin with all the force of my shoulder and arm, backed by the momentum of my charging body. Not particularly clever, that, but Lord, how effective! Down he went, and this time he was also out.

But he hadn't crumpled up on the floor before the roar of a pistol shook the room. Then a perfect fusillade burst forth, and I felt a bullet rake my ribs.

I came back to a realization that Grier was not the only person in the room and looked for this new foe. The doorway was full of terrified people, all screaming, at least it seemed so, but the shooting was not from there. Milly stood motionless and silent in her corner. Who was cutting loose with—

AND then I laughed, and pointed toward the fire, where the automatic Grier had tossed away made another explosive hop on the red coals and leaped clean out onto the hearth. His chance swing had landed it among the crackling logs.

That comedy touch cooled the fighting blood in my veins instantly. I looked around. The room was a mass of wrecked chairs, upturned, splintered table legs, a mirror shattered by Grier's flying book-end, a cabinet filled with something or other in the *objet d'art* line on its face, lamps, candelabra, fire screen, and other stuff all higgly-piggly on the floor. And half the embers of the fireplace, kicked out by the bucking automatic, glowed and smoked upon the carpet. We certainly had had a fight.

Into my vision stalked a thin, rather short, elderly lady, with white hair coiled on her head and a back as straight as a pencil. She halted in front of me as fearlessly as if I had been some sort of waxworks murderer, a horrible object, but harmless, and looked me over through gold-rimmed glasses. I couldn't have been very pretty, for my nose had been bleeding quite freely, my collar had popped off in front, my face was raw, my coat sleeves were almost split off at the shoulders, my trousers, soggy and crinkled, had a bad rip in one knee, and, to cap the climax, a very thin stream of blood from the bullet scratch on my ribs trickled down one trouser leg and overflowed onto the floor from my shoe.

"Milly, is this a burglar or a guest?" the old lady demanded, and not for an instant did her hypnotizing stare leave me.

"A guest, mother," Milly said so faintly the words were hardly audible. "He—I——"

A woman I hadn't seen before stuck her head in the doorway, uttered a shriek that whistled in my ears, and collapsed against the butler.

"Don't be a fool, Cora," said Mrs. Pearse crossly, and beckoned imperatively to an elderly man, no bigger than herself, who had been standing apprehensively in the hall just behind the butler. "Courtoyer, come here!" she commanded.

Courtoyer, whom I recognized by name as the father of Milly, braced himself and reluctantly entered the room. She spoke again:

"Guests or not, these *gentlemen*"—the word seared like a hot poker—"have violated the hospitality of your house. I want you to eject them both. Throw them out on the sidewalk, Courtoyer!"

Mr. Pearse looked at me appealing-

ly, then down at the big bulk of Grier.

I stole a glance at Milly. She was still standing in the corner, looking at me, her arms resting upon the back of the one chair undamaged in the room. I tried to read her eyes, but they were almost blank, with a sort of faint echo of that same almost accusing, almost entreating glance. This scrap hadn't cleared that mystery.

"All right, Myra," Mr. Pearse said resignedly, and he clenched his small, withered fists and moved toward me. The appeal had faded, and a desperate determination wrinkled his features. I wanted to laugh, but I didn't.

"You needn't hit me; I'm going," I said.

"Take—take this fellow out with you!" he snapped, but I could read gratitude in his eyes.

I bent submissively, heaved the body of Grier, who was just beginning to stir, onto my back, fireman-fashion, and walked out of the room. The butler opened the door for us.

ONCE outside, I swung Grier off my shoulders and sat him up on the steps leading to the little vestibule. He was still dazed, but coming to rapidly. He recognized me, and scowled hideously.

"Your game's up—both ways," I told him. "Time to skip. You've escaped jail because the Pearses think it would be too hard on the other prisoners to lock you up. Move!"

I stood there in front of the closed door and waited for him to get up. He rose to his feet unsteadily, looked at me with a yearning for murder in his face, and then, without a word, walked staggeringly toward Fifth Avenue. I caught a glimpse of a blue uniform coming toward him, so perhaps he did land in jail. He certainly looked drunk.

As for me, I discreetly went in the other direction, for I looked worse than drunk. For blocks I just walked on, or perhaps reeled, for I was exhausted. The cold air cooled my head, and finally I summoned the energy to mop at my flowing nose. The scratch on the ribs no longer bled much.

Gradually I began to think. "This doesn't end things," I muttered. "Since I've cleaned up one of Milly's lovers it's up to me to bring her back the other. Whatever that pup Masterson is, Milly wants him. She doesn't love him, but she wants him. Got to get him back."

CHAPTER X

THE HIGHER FLIGHT

I FLAGGED a taxi, buzzed down to my rooms in the Chelsea district, and hocked a gold watch I still had at the pawnshop I had been patronizing. With the proceeds I bought thirty gallons of gasoline in cans and loaded up the taxi.

The flying boat was still moored where I had left it at the seaplane harbor. I didn't get too badly wet when I jumped for the wing, dangled my weary legs in the chill water of the river, and finally hauled myself on board. Gassing her didn't take long, and the motor responded like a thoroughbred when I pressed on the starter.

From the start of that flight I went out after altitude, for although I had plenty of confidence in my flying ability now, I was going to need every foot of height I could get. At the Battery, where I left the streets of the city behind me, like glowworms in ranks, I found I had collected fifteen hundred feet, and by the time I was off Coney Island I had added three thousand to that. Five thousand was what I needed.

When I reached the Fire Island sandbar I kept the motor full on until I guessed I was within two miles of

my destination. Then I switched off and put the ship into as gentle a glide as would keep her steady. The night was dark, and so was that long, narrow islet, but I was flying navy style, aiming for my destination on a calculation of air speed, distance, and wind, rather than by landmarks. Of course my rough friends would fade at the first sound of a seaplane motor, if they hadn't skipped already, so I had to rely on my glide to get me near them silently. I kept my eye peeled for a light on that sand spit, for I didn't believe anyone else would be near the place.

I'd used up thirty-five hundred feet of my altitude and was figuring I was about opposite the bungalow, when I was startled to observe a queer, dark blur on the water's edge, standing out against the white surface of the sand. It looked like a small boat, and I thought it was moving.

It cost me a thousand feet of height to get a better view, and I had to come down slowly to keep the interwing wires from whistling a warning. But I made it out as a rowboat, with two or three people in it, still in the shallow water near the island, and heading for the mainland.

I wasn't more than five hundred feet above, when the whir of the idling propeller gave me away. Instantly the men in the boat confirmed my suspicions. They swung it around in disorderly haste and began pulling hard for the nearby shore. But you can't race a seaplane in a rowboat, and they soon realized it. I had switched on the motor when they saw me, so the first indication I had that they were firing on me came in the sight of little orange flecks of light dancing in the boat.

Unless you have the luck of an entire army bunched, you can't pot a man in a moving plane, so I wasn't worried when I charged at them, keeping the keel of my boat just off of the water.

"Here's where dear Jeremy gets the bath of his life," I couldn't help thinking, as the plane, thundering like a battery of howitzers, and belching spurts of flame from her exhaust, rushed at the rowboat. The gunmen didn't wait to do much in the close range shooting line. Even in that darkness the white splashes they made as they went overboard into the shallows were both large and sudden in my vision. I counted only two.

Beaching the boat, I jumped over into a foot of water and stood between the shore and the sound of floundering bodies. I felt certain they wouldn't try the boat again, and I wasn't worried about either of them having the presence of mind to hang onto his automatic as he dived for the bottom.

When they came, they came together, and they were so sure I was heeled that they came with their hands up, and shouting that their intentions were most amiable.

"All right, ya got us," Belcher's chattering voice conceded, as he waded within talking distance. "Just let us git outa this ice-water and we'll do anything you say."

"He's said it," Stokes agreed. "Gawd! I'm numb to the belt awready."

They sloshed nearer.

"Where's Masterson?" I demanded. Neither man spoke for an instant, and I did not wait too long for a reply.

"Lead the way, and if you try anything rough, I'll make it so hot for you, you'll wish you were back in the bay," I told them.

"We'll show ya," Belcher promised as he headed eagerly for shore. "We didn't wanta hurt the little guy, understand, but we couldn't leave him kickin' around loose till we'd made our getaway."

I fell in behind them, and they led me to the bungalow. It was dark, and seemingly empty. Stokes groped for matches while I stood alertly by the door. When his partner had lighted a lantern, Belcher pointed to the loose boards in the floor and turned sullenly to me.

"We stuck him underneat' so——"

He stopped suddenly, as he saw in the dim light that I was empty-handed. With a shriek of exhortation to Stokes, he charged me, drawing his blackjack. Stokes, understanding the play, followed.

I was chilled and almost eager for some exercise. But I hurt my sore right hand on Belcher's cheek as I dodged his swinging weapon, and he went down and nearly joined Masterson beneath the flimsy boards. Stokes, empty-handed, hastily put on the brakes, but the momentum of his plunge brought him right to me. He wasn't set for a blow, so I grabbed him by the waist and slammed his long, thin carcass down on Belcher, for whom I was acquiring a dislike. He didn't get up. Although Belcher wriggled out from under him, he did no more than sit up.

"Aw right, aw right," he muttered peevishly as he felt his cheek. "Ya can't blame a guy for tryin', can ya? Watcha gunna do wit' us?"

"Get Masterson out of there," I commanded. They both complied, and a minute later a rope-wrapped form was hauled up through the flooring.

"We figgered it would take the guy a coupla hours to wiggle outa them ropes," Belcher explained as he took up the slack of the rope and applied a burning match to sever it.

INASMUCH as Masterson was already stiff with cold, the estimate was conservative. I swung the door open as soon as they had finished unbinding their captive.

"Get out!" I commanded, and assisted Belcher's exit with a hearty kick. Stokes breezed by with better luck. I jumped after them, and rather wearily chivvied them several hundred yards toward the ocean side, away from the plane, jerking them to their feet when they fell in the deep sand, and speeding them with cuffs and horrible threats.

Masterson was a job, but I got him thawed at last. He was weeping brokenly, and exhibited an eye already blackening.

"That beast Belcher struck me," he sobbed.

"What for?" I asked, suddenly interested. Had Milly divined a man beneath this unpromising, cowardly exterior? "Did you slam him?"

"I gave him no cause whatever," he asserted thickly. "He did it for luck, he said."

"Shucks!" I muttered to myself. "I shouldn't have hit Belcher so hard. Even *he* has his points." This new failure to understand why Milly clung to Masterson had made me irritable.

I carried him to the boat, since he seemed firmly convinced that his black eye had affected his powers of locomotion, and dumped him in the forward cockpit with the canvas jacket for the motor wrapped around him.

WE burned gasoline going back, for I was in a hurry to get this distasteful job over. Masterson bleated at the bounce the ship gave when I set her down in the Hudson, but just then I wasn't interested in the fine points of flying. He managed to walk, with my assistance, up to Broadway, but we'd have made better time if I had carried him.

"I—I must get home at once, and summon my physician," he moaned. I said nothing, but halted a taxi. When I had stowed him inside I gave the driver a number and climbed in after him before the cabby could object to

the disheveled state of his fares. We buzzed through the park and out to the house in the elegant Eighties I had left in such disgrace.

"But—but this is not my home," Masterson protested as I pulled him out and propelled him to the door. "I—I cannot call on Miss Pearse in my condition. I need medical attention—rest."

"You aren't calling, Jeremy, you're being brought!" I snapped, for the deep gloom of the night before was coming down on me now that my last meeting with the girl I wanted for myself had come.

He twisted free as I rang the bell, and I had to get him by the collar.

"Release me!' he demanded fiercely, and he was kicking my shins wholeheartedly when the butler opened the door. I scooped him up under my arm and half dragged him, with dangling legs, past the protesting servant.

"Call Miss Pearse, please," I commanded savagely, and hustled Masterson ahead of me toward the room in which Grier and I had met.

The wreckage of the fray had not yet been wholly cleared, but it was not splintered furniture that caught my eye. Milly was there, standing before the fireplace gazing fearfully at the book-end Grier had slung at me. The heavy bit of metal slipped from her fingers and chipped the stone of the hearth as she looked up. She stared at me incredulously; then her eyes dropped to the figure of Masterson.

"Here he is," I said hoarsely. "Grier kidnaped him, but since you want him, I've brought him back."

She came toward me and stretched out her arms impulsively.

"Chris—Chris," she said, and her swollen, red-rimmed eyes were very tender.

I gazed at her stupidly, my grip on Masterson relaxing.

She laughed, with a little quaver in her voice, at my expression.

"Oh, I am quite shameless now," she murmured, though the red rose swiftly in her cheeks. "I cannot have you misunderstand again."

I tried to speak, but could say nothing. The weariness, the ache of my body, the cold that still numbed me, dulled my brain.

MASTERSON chirped something, but I gripped his shoulder and with a none too powerful shove sent him through the doorway. Whatever this was, it was between Milly and me. Perhaps I heard aright, but I doubted it.

"Don't you see?" she said gently, and took my dirty, battered right hand to lead me to a splintered *chaise longue*. "Don't you understand—yet? You came from nowhere, Chris. But—but after the brave, careless way you took Jeremy's horse you were never like that again, never the reckless, gallant man I hoped that I had found."

"Reckless — gallant," I muttered, still in a maze. "I was more than that, Milly. I worked in an office, took the abuse of a pussycat partner, acted as tame as—as—what did you want me to be?"

"Yourself," she whispered. "The man you were this evening when you fought an armed man bare-handed. The man you must have been to rescue poor Jeremy from whatever danger he has been in. Oh, why did you not take me with you when you left the room!"

"Jeremy," I repeated, grasping at the word. Jeremy was concrete. "What about him? You're engaged to him."

"He has been pestering me for more than a year to marry him, an alliance of families and fortunes, he calls it, for he does not love me," she

explained patiently. She cast down her eyes. Her words came softly now.

"When you—raced into my life I —I wanted something to pique you—to make you do something desperate if—if you wanted me badly enough. And day by day you let me be dragged nearer and nearer to a marriage with *him*—that poor thing!"

It was my turn to hesitate, then. "I—I asked you to marry me," I said weakly.

"Not the way I wanted you to ask me!"

I stood up. Things were getting clearer. That accusing look in her eyes, that appeal to which I had responded with a flood of talk! I saw myself a dolt, a bigger fool than I believed a man could be. I had arms to take her, and I had used my tongue instead. She wanted a heedless adventurer, and I had been busy concealing my restless nature in the lying guise and manners of a clerk.

No more words were wasted. There was need of none between us now. It was quite a long time before I spoke again. Then I said definitely:

"We're leaving town. I don't know where we're going or whether we're flying Gregg's plane or driving a flivver, but we're going together. And what I can do to make you happy, if it's knitting tidies or biting holes in a battleship, that I will do."

"Amen," Milly said solemnly, so solemnly that I thought we were already in church.

Arnold's Vampire

A Hungarian vampire who devasted a village, led to an inquiry being held by the state, in which astounding facts were attested to by officials, surgeons and other witnesses.

A certain Paul Arnold died. A month later four people died with every symptom of having been drained of their blood. Suspicion narrowed down to Arnold, as it was recollected he had once complained of having been attacked by a vampire, whom he had finally escaped.

The body was dug up, and found bathed in fresh blood. The village bailiff drove a stake through the heart, and the usual proceeding of beheading and burning was followed. The same thing was done to the four victims, for it was feared they had contracted the same blood-thirst.

Five years later, however, there was an epidemic of the curse. Seventeen persons of all ages and both sexes died bearing the pallor and mysterious throat punctures. An inquiry was held once more, and this time it was found that Arnold, as a vampire, had attacked several beasts. It was presumed that the present victims had eaten the flesh of these animals and so been attacked.

A general resolution was made to dig up all those who had lately died, and out of forty, seventeen were found with the vampire appearance. The bodies were burned, and a full report of the matter sent to the Royal Commission at Vienna.

As a precaution against the visitation of vampires there was but one of any power, a wreath of garlic worn about the throat or hung in the window.

Fruits of Innocence

By DALE COLLINS

This is the second of a series of short stories retailing the startling adventures of PETER LAMB.

IN THE matter of Lady Ursula Waddington the ignorance of little Mr. Lamb was bliss.

One more versed in women would have suspected her from the beginning, would have recognized that she was of the type who always needs something from a man whether it be understanding, a small loan or other tribute, and would have lent an attentive ear to the gossips. Little Mr. Lamb, however, was dazzled at their first meeting, and blind to his peril throughout the whole of that delightful voyage.

In the circumstances this was not surprising. Lady Ursula had perfect features, wistful gray eyes and a mouth which smiled enigmatically. She was neither young nor old, and Sir Albert was always in the smoke-room. It will be understood that on a liner in Eastern waters such a lady commanded the compassionate interest of the unwary.

Mr. Lamb's romance began in the customary fashion.

They were strolling on the promenade-deck after dinner.

"What a divine night," breathed Lady Ursula. "Oh, Mr. Lamb, let's go up into the bows and watch the phosphorescence. It will be glorious this evening; and *you* will appreciate its loveliness!"

"With the greatest pleasure," Mr. Lamb agreed, and much needed inches were added to this stature by the pride aroused by that lisping emphasis on the pronoun.

They went for'ard, Mr. Lamb assisting his lady over the obstacles in the wall-deck with a hand which was somewhat unsteady. The fo'c'sle-head was buried in tropical gloom. Behind them the lights of the ship seemed to belong to something from which they were cut off. There were bright stars all about, in sky and sea, and the steel beneath their feet throbbed and trembled. The air was full of the sound of rushing water, and leaning over the rail they watched the waves flame about the bows in cataracts of ghostly light.

"You are an artist. Ah, how I envy you!" said Lady Ursula presently in a subdued and friendly tone. "I love nothing more than the glory of stained-glass in a dim cathedral. Ah, Peter Lamb, where do you get your inspirations for your Madonnas and your sweet and gracious saints?"

She turned her head a little, and, indeed, her profile against the night sky was as inspiring as she knew it to be.

"You—! Now—!" gasped little Mr. Lamb, but his breath left him and he could only worship.

"Is there a Saint Ursula?" she asked.

"There is," cried Mr. Lamb. "She is—she is as beautiful as this night, and you——" But he lacked the courage and the skill to pay the compliment.

Lady Ursula allowed her cool, soft hand to fall on his, where it lay upon the rail.

"There's a bond between—a sympathy," she declared. "You interest

me so. Tell me—please tell me all about yourself. I've been lonely, wretched, for so long. I need your friendship, and your understanding!"

BLAME the night, blame simplicity, but do not blame little Mr. Lamb. He told of himself in disjointed sentences; told of his modest fortune acquired by success at his art which enabled him to be traveling, told of how empty was his life of the beauty of romance, and so gaining confidence became almost poetical under the bright stars of the East.

When Lady Ursula found a friend with whom she had a spiritual bond, she was as responsive and generous as she was wonderful. Also, but this was not for Mr. Lamb, her enigmatic mouth smiled at the thought of the slaughter of the innocent, and she wondered whether it might not make a good subject to be immortalized in stained-glass, though, perhaps, not for exhibition in a church.

"You are a most remarkable personality," she murmured.

"Not at all! Not at all!" said little Mr. Lamb, blinded by the vanity which dwells in the most humble of men.

Lady Ursula looked sad and in need of consolation. Mr. Lamb's pulses beat fast. He could not know that her expression was due to the fact that she played the game for the love of the game as well as for the profit, and this game was going to be too easy.

TWO evenings later the deck-chairs of Lady Ursula and Mr. Lamb were close together on the lee side in the shadow.

"Hush!" she said abruptly. "Here comes my husband." And urgently: "Peter, if he asks us to play cards we must agree. I think—I think he's getting suspicious!"

"Suspicious!" Mr. Lamb was alarmed and uneasy.

"Yes, hush!" She raised her voice. "Where to, Bert?"

Sir Albert paused.

"Oh, you're there!" he said, with a suggestion of roughness in his tone. "I've been looking for you all over, Ursula. You knew I wanted a game tonight. I've got three for poker. Won't you join?"

"Certainly," Lady Ursula replied. "Perhaps Mr. Lamb will——? As Sir Albert looked down at Mr. Lamb the light from a porthole fell upon him, revealing a large, bluff, red-faced man, like a squire from a Christmas card, hearty and hard-drinking and loud of voice.

"That would be excellent," he boomed. "What do you say about it, Lamb? Poker?"

"Well——" Mr. Lamb began nervously, and broke off.

"Oh, *do!*" urged Lady Ursula.

"I'd like nothing beter," Mr. Lamb admitted, "but I'm afraid I couldn't play well enough!"

"But poker's the simplest game," Sir Albert pointed out.

"I know," agreed Mr. Lamb. "A friend of mine, a deacon at Winchester, taught me how to play it, but——"

If Sir Albert and his lady had not been such artists they must have spoiled everything by a wild guffaw, but, as it was, the only sound was Lady Ursula's gratified voice expressing her pleasure and suggesting that they should play on deck because it was cooler.

"I'm sure you'll not put up with my poor skill," apologized little Mr. Lamb.

"Rubbish, my dear chap," said Sir Albert heartily. "We don't pretend to be experts ourselves. It's all a matter of killing time on shipboard!"

"If you'll make allowances then," said little Mr. Lamb.

Lady Ursula gave his hand the lightest of caresses under cover of the darkness. He was reassured.

THE game, after some slight uncertainty and hesitancy on Mr. Lamb's part had been overcome, was a complete success. Two pleasant young men of wealth traveling for experience made up the party.

The betting was quiet for a time, although, as Sir Albert pointed out, there was no need for caution, since they were only playing dollar rises. On his own deal, remembering this fact, Sir Albert went for a little flutter. This one and that dropped out, and, presently, to his embarrassment Mr. Lamb found himself engaged in single combat with Ursula's husband. At fifteen dollars Sir Albert saw little Mr. Lamb's hand.

"I have only four tens."

"Good Lord, three aces!" mourned Sir Albert.

"Then I lose?"

"No! No! No! You win!" cried Lady Ursula, delight getting the better of her caution and infusing unusual warmth into her voice. Some of this warmth crept into Mr. Lamb's heart.

"Beginners' luck!" grumbled Sir Albert, and paid.

The game opened out. Hands improved and rises and bets grew larger. A steward brought drinks. The world was a pleasant place. A breeze cooled the air. Little Mr. Lamb won and won. At the end of the evening he was $150 to the good. Lady Ursula had won a few dollars, Sir Albert had lost a few more and the amiable young men shared the rest of the deficit.

"You can't grumble," Sir Albert consoled them. "You did very well last night."

"Rather!" they agreed in chorus, though it was annoying to think that they had lost, while such a ninny as the little man had won.

"The deacon's lessons have stood me in good stead," chuckled Mr. Lamb with the pardonable self-satisfaction of the successful novice.

"Pride goes before a fall," Lady Ursula warned him laughingly, and she added to her husband: "In my opinion, Bert, you're a fool ever to touch cards!"

"The luck must change, my dear," Sir Albert answered good-naturedly.

As the party dispersed, Mr. Lamb, flushed by success and unwonted excitement, found an opportunity to whisper to Lady Ursula that he hoped cards were not going to deprive them of their pleasant hours together.

"There is time for everything aboard a ship," said Lady Ursula, and her mouth smiled promises at little Mr. Lamb which filled his already joyous heart with greater gladness.

IN her warning to Sir Albert and in her promise to Mr. Lamb Lady Ursula revealed a gift for prophecy. In the days that followed there proved to be ample time for the friendship Mr. Lamb treasured to ripen and develop, and the cards remained the enemies of her luckless husband. The only consolation for Sir Albert was that they were even greater enemies of the two young men, and thus he recouped some of his losses. Mr. Lamb, apologetic, gentle and bewildered, the electric light glinting on his pince-nez, went on his triumphant way, victorious alike in love and cards. Sir Albert was a perfect gentleman and kept his temper, but at times the effort was considerable.

In the privacy of their cabin he complained to Lady Ursula.

"Damn it all, Lulu," said he, "that little fool's uncanny. It's only his foolishness saves him; if he had one ounce of sense, one drop of gumption,

he'd be the easiest mark ever born: But what can one do against idiocy? I deal him three kings and he throws them in, giving me nothing for my three aces. And in the next hand he wins a tenner on two small pairs. The man doesn't know the value of a hand and that's the whole thing. If he played for the next twenty years he'd still be as mad, and he'd still win!"

"You'll catch him in the end, Jim," said Lady Ursula.

"That's so," Sir Albert agreed, and then, with a sharp glance: "I say, how much trouble are you taking with him? You seem to be playing the game pretty well!"

"All work and no play makes Jill a dull girl," said Lady Ursula, and she made a grimace at her knight which was anything but ladylike.

Sir Albert looked peevish.

"You're clever, Lulu," he remarked, "but your services are expensive!"

"You shouldn't be jealous of the poor little creature," Lady Ursula reproved him. "He's such a helpless lost babe; he deserves mothering."

"The devil!" commented Sir Albert. Apparently he was not referring to little Mr. Lamb.

SCOTSMEN have a way of being exactly as they should be to fit into the literary convention. Andrew Murray was of the breed. He was a mining engineer, dour, six feet two inches tall, gray-eyed, broad shouldered, rough of voice and hard of face, with the heart of a Sister of Mercy and the thirst of a camel-driver. Scotsmen are like that. It is worth noticing.

Andrew Murray, then stood by the bar in the smoke-room, and looked down at little Mr. Lamb over half a tumbler of neat whisky. Little Mr. Lamb was indignant, his feelings had been outraged, his chivalry aroused and his judgment of men and women impugned. All these things are apt to irritate a small and innocent man who is obviously unfitted to be wandering the world without a guardian.

Murray allowed Mr. Lamb's mutterings to die down, and then he spoke in a tone of finality:

"'Tis no use havering. I did but speak for ye're ain guid. I wouldna trust them as far as yon door-r-r. I am not a man to pay heed to r-r-rumors, but I canna but believe yon couple are no more than a pair o' sharpers, and no more Sir So-and-So and Lady Such-and-Such than they are a pair o' elephants."

The gray eyes considered angry little Mr. Lamb, and so considering softened suddenly. "I am sorry ye will not be warned," said Andrew Murray. "Sair sorry, for ye are a guid smâ' man!"

"I must ask you not to pursue the subject," said little Mr. Lamb firmly.

"A mule and a fule will not be led nor warned," said the engineer.

The matter ended there, but Murray would have felt no satisfaction in seeing his warning justified when Lady Ursula and little Mr. Lamb stood on the boat-deck in the moonlight that same night.

"I don't know what's come over me," Mr. Lamb confessed, shame on his face and in his voice. "I lead such a quiet, scholarly life that all this is like a dream to me. Yet there are moments when I scorn myself."

Lady Ursula cried out her indignation.

"Here am I making love to a man's wife and winning his money at cards at the same time," Mr. Lamb explained, but he could not prevent a note of pride creeping into his voice because there is a certain satisfaction in being wicked, particularly if one is insignificant and wears a drooping mustache.

"It's his own fault for being a fool," said Lady Ursula. "He should never have married me; he should

never play cards; neither is a proper occupation for a fool!"

THE conversation drifted on upon the foolishness of Sir Albert, and it eventuated that he was very wealthy and that his mission in the East was to take up an option on a fabulously rich tin field. The option was held by a small syndicate of which he was the largest shareholder. There was a fortune in it.

"A fortune?" gasped little Mr. Lamb enviously, for his moral fibre had been sapped by his gambling experiences.

"A fortune," said Lady Ursula simply. She looked sympathetically at poor Mr. Lamb standing there in the moonlight like a covetous child. "Oh," she burst out, "if it were only you; you could make use of wealth."

"Wealth!" echoed Mr. Lamb.

For a long time Lady Ursula remained silent, staring along the path of moonlight on the sea, which, as every one knows, leads to the land of dreams.

"It might be done," she said at last, very quietly. "He is such a fool, and I can tie him around my little finger. How much money could you lay your hands on in ready cash, Peter?"

Mr. Lamb thought.

"About $25,000 when we reach Batavia. I have a letter of credit for that amount."

Again Lady Ursula meditated.

"It's an absurd sum," she said and laughed musically like the sea. "Quite absurd! But I do believe, Peter, I'm clever enough to be able to repay you just a little for all your friendship and sympathy have meant to me on this voyage."

"I need no repayment," said little Mr. Lamb. He pressed her hand to his lips. "You," said he earnestly, "are my very dear, dear lady!"

The moon shone on them, and the sea sang by.

WHATEVER the efforts she exerted on his behalf, Lady Ursula made no further reference to them, and Mr. Lamb was far too humble to make inquiries. He contented himself with winning at poker. The two young men had faded out of the game, but, encouraged by Mr. Lamb's success—it was obvious that if he could win anybody could—two other players filled the vacant chairs.

With the end of the voyage approaching, Sir Albert's good temper had returned.

"One must simply accept these runs of bad luck," he said. "This ship's been unlucky. Well, here's hoping the next one is better." And with that, like a true sportsman, he drained his glass with a nod to little Mr. Lamb.

"I am almost ashamed," murmured Mr. Lamb.

"Don't be absurd," Lady Ursula insisted. "Nobody grudges you your success, Mr. Lamb."

"I should think not!" agreed one of the new players without much warmth.

Mr. Lamb's luck became a general topic of conversation on the ship, and as a result it was hard to believe in the scandal about Sir Albert Waddington. The gossip-mongers grew less ready to spread the rumors. Little Mr. Lamb was the unanswerable argument. No suggestion, no innuendo, could survive the question:

"Well, if the two of them are crooks, how do you account for little Mr. Lamb winning like that all the time?"

A shrug was the only reply, but Andrew Murray ventured the opinion that before the voyage was over the luck would turn, and that when it did turn the tide would bring back all that Sir Albert had lost and some to

spare. At this, the two amiable young men laughed rather bitterly. They felt they had just cause to complain against Murray, for if they had persevered a little longer their fortune might have been as good as Mr. Lamb's.

Murray was wrong. The luck held. On the last night Mr. Lamb won throughout, and, with the final rounds of ace-pots, cleared the board. Two disgruntled gentlemen departed to their cabins, and Sir Albert, his lady and little Mr. Lamb were left to finish their drinks and cigarettes. Mr. Lamb was somewhat flushed and beads of perspiration stood upon his brow, while his heart beat irregularly as if it were troubled by the roll of notes which pressed against it.

"Well, Lamb," said Sir Albert genially, "you've scooped the pool, and you should remember your friend, the deacon, very kindly. He was a good friend to you. With luck like yours you should make poker your profession."

"It's been awful," said Mr. Lamb, ashamed.

"I wish such 'awful' things would happen to me," Lady Ursula remarked.

"I bear you no ill-will," Sir Albert chuckled. "I enjoy a gamble, win or lose, and I like to meet a good gambler. You've cost me a few dollars, Lamb, but I'm glad you were aboard."

"It's very nice of you to say so, Sir Albert," said Mr. Lamb meekly.

There was a friendly pause.

"Albert," prompted Lady Ursula, "if you want to prove the truth of what you've just said you should do as you told me you intended to, I mean about the mine."

She gave Mr. Lamb a smile which was like a warning to put a guard on his tongue and a gesture which made this speech of her lord's her gift to him.

"This will come as a surprise to you, Mr. Lamb," she declared, happily.

Sir Albert hesitated.

"It's all very well, Ursula," he said. "In moments of rashness one makes these suggestions, but afterward—— Why, damn it all, reason and business sense must have a say."

"Oh, Albert!" cried Lady Ursula in bitter reproach. "And you boast you're a man of your word!"

Sir Albert was unhappy.

"Oh, very well," he said, surrendering, "if you're going to make a fuss about it, sweetheart! Look here, Lamb, this is the whole thing: "I've taken a liking to you, and I don't mind admitting that when I like a man I'm inclined to be generous, too generous. The suggestion, mark you, came from my wife. At first I wouldn't hear of it, but, after all, I'm a rich man."

And then the story of the tin option, while Lady Ursula's knee rested gently against Mr. Lamb's to remind him of the manner in which fortune had come to him. The offer was that of a fifth share for $20,000, a nominal price because capital was not the primary consideration and the sole object was to keep the good thing among friends.

"I want you, Lamb, to come in on the ground floor," said Sir Albert.

"The ground floor? I don't quite understand!" Mr. Lamb spoke like one in a trance.

Sir Albert smilingly explained, and there sat little Mr. Lamb in the tropical night dazzled by the vision of El Dorado, and yet declining the offer, because it was too generous. Such a man, Sir Albert averred, deserved good fortune and should have it.

"We'll draw up the documents in the morning," said the munificent husband of the lovely Lady Ursula.

THE steamer reached Batavia too late for the visit to the bank where Mr. Lamb had to present his letter of credit and arrange for the payment of the nominal sum to Sir Albert. They had dined together, and all was arranged. At ten next morning the business was to be transacted.

In his bedroom, at the Hotel des Indes, Mr. Lamb looked at his watch.

"Time I was away," he said. "The boat for Singapore sails at midnight."

He sealed the envelope which was to be given to Lady Ursula by the hall porter in the morning. It contained, as a farewell gift to her, the documents regarding the option which he found himself unable to accept. Then he rang for a boy, and while his luggage was being carried out to the waiting car he took out his small black book. On the credit side he made an entry for $1,500, his poker winnings. He stood musing, tapping the page with his pencil.

"A voyage as delightful as it was profitable," he said. "If rogues were not so wise how hard life would be." He sighed deeply. "It cannot be entered here in dollars and cents," he murmured, "but there is also love, which is beyond rubies. Dear! Dear! Indeed, I am fortunate!"

(The third story of this series "And the Fat Was In the Fire" will appear in our next issue out March 15.)

Sneezing Superstitions

Sneezing has been regarded by people in all ages and in all lands as unlucky, and even today the sneezer is saluted with a "God bless you," "Gesundheit," or similar good word.

The Jewish Talmud has a story that before Jacob, men never sneezed but once, and then immediately died; that the patriarch was the first who died a natural death, all men before him dying of sneezing.

The memory of this was ordered to be preserved in all nations by the command of every ruler to his subjects that they utter some form of salutary exclamation after the act of sneezing.

The first discoverers of the New World observed this practice among the natives. In an early account of the ruler of Mesopotamia, it is related that when the King sneezed those about him saluted him so loudly that the sound was heard throughout the palace, and was taken up by those in the street nearby and then in all the city, so that each sneeze was followed by the shouts of thousands of loyal subjects.

The Greeks and Romans believed a sneeze on the right was a good omen. Before a battle it was a sign of victory. A sneeze on the left prophesied disaster. It was unlucky to sneeze on certain days. The Baltic fishermen will not sail with a comrade who sneezes on Christmas day.

Wireless

By AGATHA CHRISTIE

"ABOVE all, avoid worry and excitement," said Doctor Meynell in the comfortable fashion affected by doctors.

Mrs. Harter, as is often the case with people hearing these soothing but meaningless words, seemed more doubtful than relieved.

"There is a certain cardiac weakness," continued the doctor fluently, "but nothing to be alarmed about. I can assure you of that."

"All the same," he added, "it might be as well to have a lift installed. Eh? What about it?"

Mrs. Harter looked worried.

Doctor Meynell, on the contrary, looked pleased with himself. The reason he liked attending rich patients rather than poor ones was that he could exercise his active imagination prescribing for their ailments.

"Yes, a lift," said Doctor Meynell, trying to think of something else even more dashing, and failing. "Then we shall avoid all undue exertion. Daily exercise on the level, on a fine day, but avoid walking up hills. "And above all," he added happily, "plenty of distraction for the mind. Don't dwell on your health."

To the old lady's nephew, Charles Ridgeway, the doctor was slightly more explicit.

"Do not misunderstand me," he said. "Your aunt may live for years, probably will. At the same time, shock or overexertion might carry her off like that!" He snapped his fingers. "She must lead a very quiet life. No exertion. No fatigue. But, of course, she must not be allowed to brood. She must be kept cheerful and the mind well-distracted."

"Distracted," said Charles Ridgeway thoughtfully.

Charles was a thoughtful young man. He was also a young man who believed in furthering his own inclinations whenever possible.

That evening he suggested the installation of a wireless set.

Mrs. Harter, already seriously upset at the thought of the lift, was disturbed and unwilling. Charles was fluent and persuasive.

"I do not know that I care for these new-fangled things," said Mrs. Harter piteously. "The waves, you know, the electric waves. They might affect me."

Charles in a superior and kindly fashion pointed out the futility of this idea.

Mrs. Harter, whose knowledge of the subject was of the vaguest, but who was tenacious of her own opinion, remained unconvinced.

"All that electricity," she murmured timorously. "You may say what you like, Charles, but some people *are* affected by electricity. I always have a terrible headache before a thunderstorm. I know that."

She nodded her head triumphantly.

Charles was a patient young man. He was also persistent.

"My dear Aunt Mary," he said, "let me make the thing clear to you."

He was something of an authority on the subject. He delivered now quite a lecture on the theme; warm-

ing to his task, he spoke of bright-emitter valves, of dull-emitter valves, and of high frequency and low frequency, of amplification and of condensers.

Mrs. Harter, submerged in a sea of words that she did not understand, surrendered.

"Of course, Charles," she murmured, "if you really think——"

"My dear Aunt Mary," said Charles enthusiastically, "it is the very thing for you, to keep you from moping and all that."

The lift prescribed by Doctor Meynell was installed shortly afterward and was very nearly the death of Mrs. Harter since, like many other old ladies, she had a rooted objection to strange men in the house. She suspected them one and all of having designs on her old silver.

After the lift came the installation of the wireless. Again strange men invaded the house, with Charles enthusiastically in charge of operations. Finally, Mrs. Harter was left to contemplate the, to her, repellent object of a large ungainly-looking box studded with knobs.

It took all Charles's enthusiasm to reconcile her to it.

Charles was in his element; he turned knobs, discoursing eloquently the while.

MRS. HARTER sat in her high-backed chair patient and polite, with a rooted conviction in her own mind that these new-fangled notions were neither more nor less than unmitigated nuisances.

"Listen, Aunt Mary, we are onto Paris; isn't that splendid? Can you hear the fellow?"

"I can't hear anything except a good deal of buzzing and clicking," said Mrs. Harter.

Charles continued to twirl knobs. "Brussels," he announced with enthusiasm.

"Is it really?" said Mrs. Harter, with no more than a trace of interest.

Charles again turned knobs and an unearthly howl echoed forth into the room.

"Now we seem to be on to the Dogs' Home," said Mrs. Harter, who was an old lady with a certain amount of spirit.

"Ha-ha!" said Charles. "You will have your joke, won't you, Aunt Mary? Very good, that!"

Mrs. Harter could not help smiling at him. She was very fond of Charles. For some years a niece, Miriam Harter, had lived with her. She had intended to make the girl her heiress, but Miriam had not been a success. She was impatient and obviously bored by her aunt's society. She was always out, 'gadding about', as Mrs. Harter called it. In the end, she had entangled herself with a young man of whom her aunt thoroughly disapproved.

Miriam had been returned to her mother with a curt note, much as if she had been goods on approval. She had married the young man in question and Mrs. Harter usually sent her a handkerchief case or a table centre at Christmas.

Having found nieces disappointing, Mrs. Harter turned her attention to nephews. Charles, from the first, had been an unqualified success. He was always pleasantly deferential to his aunt, and listened with an appearance of intense interest to the reminiscences of her youth.

In this he was a great contrast to Miriam, who had been frankly bored and showed it. Charles was never bored, he was always good-tempered, always gay. He told his aunt many times a day that she was a perfectly marvelous old lady.

HIGHLY satisfied with her new acquisition, Mrs. Harter had written to her lawyer with instructions as to

the making of a new will. This was sent to her, duly approved by her, and signed.

And now, even in the matter of the wireless, Charles soon proved to have won fresh laurels.

Mrs. Harter, at first antagonistic, became tolerant and finally fascinated. She enjoyed it very much better when Charles was out. The trouble with Charles was that he could not leave the thing alone.

Mrs. Harter would be seated in her chair comfortably listening to a symphony concert or a lecture on Lucrezia Borgia or Pond Life, quite happy and at peace with the world. Not so Charles. The harmony would be shattered by discordant shrieks he enthusiastically attempted to "get onto Vienna." But on those evenings when Charles was dining out with friends, Mrs. Harter enjoyed the wireless very much indeed. She would turn on two switches, sit in her high-backed chair and enjoy the program of the evening.

It was about three months after the wireless had been installed that the first eerie happening occurred. Charles was absent, at a bridge party.

The program for that evening was a Ballad Concert. A well-known soprano was singing "Annie Laurie," and in the middle of "Annie Laurie" a strange thing happened. There was a sudden break, the music ceased for a moment, the buzzing clicking noise continued and then that, too, died away. There was a dead silence, and then very faintly a low buzzing sound was heard.

Mrs. Harter got the impression, why she did not know, that the machine was tuned in to somewhere very far away, and then clearly and distinctly a voice spoke, a man's voice with a faint Irish accent. . . .

"Mary—can you hear me, Mary? It is Patrick speaking . . . I am coming for you soon. You will be ready, won't you, Mary?"

Then, almost immediately, the strains of "Annie Laurie" once more filled the room.

Mrs. Harter sat rigid in her chair, her hands clenched on each arm of it. Had she been dreaming? Patrick! Patrick's voice! Patrick's voice in this very room, speaking to her.

No, it must be a dream, an hallucination, perhaps. She must just have dropped off to sleep for a minute or two. A curious thing to have dreamed, that her dead husband's voice should speak to her over the ether. It frightened her just a little. What were the words he had said?

"I am coming for you soon, Mary. You will be ready, won't you?"

Was it, could it be a premonition? Cardiac weakness! Her heart. After all, she was getting on in years.

"It's a warning; that's what it is," said Mrs. Harter, rising slowly from her chair, and adding:

"All that money wasted on putting in a lift!"

She said nothing of her experience to anyone, but for the next day or two she was thoughtful and a little preoccupied.

And then came the second occasion. Again she was alone in the room. The wireless, which had been playing an orchestral selection, died away with the same suddenness as before.

Again there was a silence, the sense of distance, and finally Patrick's voice, not as it had been in life, but a voice rarified, far away, with a strange unearthly quality.

"Patrick speaking to you, Mary. I will be coming for you very soon now . . ."

.....Then, click, buzz, and the orchestral selection was in full swing again.

Mrs. Harter glanced at the clock. No, she had not been asleep this time. Awake and in full possession of her faculties, she had heard Patrick's

voice speaking. It was no hallucination, she was sure of that. In a confused way she tried to think over all that Charles had explained to her of the theory of ether waves.

COULD it be that Patrick had really spoken to her? That his actual voice had been wafted through space? There were missing wave-lengths or something of that kind. She remembered Charles speaking of "gaps in the scale." Perhaps the missing waves explained all the so-called psychological phenomena? No, there was nothing inherently impossible in the idea. Patrick had spoken to her. He had availed himself of modern science to prepare her for what must soon be coming.

Mrs. Harter rang the bell for her maid, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth was a tall, gaunt woman of sixty. Beneath an unbending exterior she concealed a wealth of affection and tenderness for her mistress.

"Elizabeth," said Mrs. Harter when her faithful retainer had appeared, "you remember what I told you? The top left-hand drawer of my bureau. It is locked, the long key with the white label. Everything is there ready."

"Ready, Ma'am?"

"For my burial," snorted Mrs. Harter. "You know perfectly well what I mean, Elizabeth. You helped me to put the things there yourself."

Elizabeth's face began to work strangely.

"Oh, ma'am," she wailed. "Don't dwell on such things. I thought you was a sight better."

"We have all got to go some time or another," said Mrs. Harter practically. "I am over my three-score years and ten, Elizabeth. There there, don't make a fool of yourself. If you must cry, go and cry somewhere else."

Elizabeth retired, till sniffling.

Mrs. Harter looked after her with a good deal of affection.

"Silly old fool, but faithful," she said, "very faithful. Let me see, was it a hundred pounds or only fifty I left her? It ought to be a hundred. She has been with me a long time."

The point worried the old lady and the next day she sat down and wrote to her lawyer asking if he would send her her will so that she might look it over. It was that same day that Charles startled her by something he said at lunch.

"By the way, Aunt Mary," he said, "who is that funny old josher up in the spare room? The picture over the mantelpiece. I mean. The 'old johnny' with the beaver and side whiskers?"

Mrs. Harter looked at him austerely.

"That is your Uncle Patrick as a young man," she said.

"Oh, I say, Aunt Mary, I am awfully sorry. I didn't mean to be rude."

Mrs. Harter accepted the apology with a dignified bend of the head.

Charles went on rather uncertainly:

"I just wondered. You see——"

He stopped undecidedly and Mrs. Harter said sharply:

"Well? What were you going to say?"

"Nothing," said Charles hastily. "Nothing that makes sense, I mean."

FOR the moment the old lady said nothing more, but later that day, when they were alone together, she returned to the subject.

"I wish you would tell me, Charles, what it was made you ask me about that picture of your uncle?"

"I told you, Aunt Mary. It was nothing but a silly fancy of mine, quite absurd."

"Charles," said Mrs. Harter in her

most autocratic voice, "I insist upon knowing."

"Well, my dear aunt, if you will have it, I fancied I saw him—the man in the picture, I mean—looking out of the end window when I was coming up the drive last night. Some effect of the light, I suppose.

"I wondered who on earth he could be, the face was so—early victorian, if you know what I mean. And then Elizabeth said there was no one, no visitor or stranger, in the house, and later in the evening I happened to drift into the spare room, and there was the picture over the mantelpiece. My man to the life! It is quite easily explained, really, I expect. Sub-conscious and all that. Must have noticed the picture before without realizing that I had noticed it, and then just fancied the face at the window."

"The end window?" said Mrs. Harter sharply.

"Yes, why?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Harter.

But she was startled all the same. That room had been her husband's dressing-room.

That same evening, Charles again being absent, Mrs. Harter sat listening to the wireless with feverish impatience. If for the third time she heard the mysterious voice, it would prove to her finally and without a shadow of doubt that she was really in communication with some other world.

Although her heart beat faster, she was not surprised when the same break occurred, and after the usual interval of deadly silence the faint far away Irish voice spoke once more.

"Mary—you are prepared now. . . . On Friday I shall come for you. . . . Friday at half-past nine. . . . Do not be afraid—there will be no pain. . . . Be ready. . . ."

Then, almost cutting short the last word, the music of the orchestra broke out again, clamorously discordant.

Mrs. Harter sat very still for a minute or two. Her face had gone white and she looked blue and pinched round the lips.

Presently she got up and sat down at her writing desk. In a somewhat shaky hand she wrote the following:

To-night, at 9:15, *I have distinctly heard the voice of my dead husband. He told me that he would come for me on Friday night at* 9:30. *If I should die on that day and at that hour I should like the facts made known so as to prove beyond question the possibility of communicating with the spirit world.—Mary Harter.*

Mrs. Harter reread what she had written, enclosed it in an envelope and addressed the envelope. Then she rang the bell, which was promptly answered by Elizabeth. Mrs. Harter got up from her desk and gave the note she had just written to the old woman.

"Elizabeth," she said, "if I should die on Friday night I should like that note to be given to Doctor Meynell. No," as Elizabeth appeared to be about to protest, "do not argue with me. You have often told me you believe in premonitions. I have a premonition now. There is one thing more. I have left you in my will £50. I should like you to have £100. If I am not able to go to the bank myself before I die, Mr. Charles will see to it."

As before, Mrs. Harter cut short Elizabeth's tearful protests. In pursuance of her determination, the old lady spoke to her nephew on the subject the following morning.

"Remember, Charles, that if anything should happen to me, Elizabeth is to have an extra £50.

"You are very gloomy these days, Aunt Mary," said Charles cheerfully. "What is going to happen to you? According to Doctor Meynell, we

shall be celebrating your hundredth birthday in twenty years or so!"

Mrs. Harter smiled affectionately at him but did not answer. After a minute or two, she said:

"What are you doing on Friday evening, Charles?"

Charles looked a trifle surprised.

"As a matter of fact, the Ewings asked me to go in and play bridge, but if you would rather I stayed at home——"

"No," said Mrs. Harter with determination. "Certainly not. I mean it, Charles. On that night of all nights I should much rather be alone."

Charles looked at her curiously, but Mrs. Harter vouchsafed no further information. She was an old lady of courage and determination. She felt that she must go through with her strange experience single-handed.

FRIDAY evening found the house very silent. Mrs. Harter sat as usual in her straight-backed chair drawn up to the fireplace. All her preparations were made. That morning she had been to the bank, had drawn out £50 in notes and had handed them over to Elizabeth despite the latter's tearful protests.

She had sorted and arranged all her personal belongings and had labeled one or two pieces of jewelry with the names of friends or relations. She had also written out a list of instructions for Charles. The Worcester tea service was to go to Cousin Emma; the Sevres jars to young William, and so on.

Now she looked at the long envelope she held in her hand and drew from it a folded document. This was her will sent to her by Mr. Hopkinson in accordance with her instructions. She had already read it carefully, but now she looked over it once more to refresh her memory. It was a short, concise document. A bequest of £50 to Elizabeth Marshall in consideration of faithful service; two bequests of £500 to a sister and a first cousin, and the remainder to her beloved nephew, Charles Ridgeway.

Mrs. Harter nodded her head several times. Charles would be a very rich man when she was dead. Well, he had been a dear good boy to her, always kind, always affectionate, and with a merry tongue which never failed to please her.

She looked at the clock. Three minutes to the half-hour. Well, she was ready. And she was calm, quite calm. Although she repeated these last words to herself several times, her heart beat strangely and unevenly. She hardly realized it herself, but she was strung up to a fine point of overwrought nerves.

Half-past nine. The wireless was switched on. What would she hear? The familiar voice of '2LO' announcing the weather forecast or that far-away voice belonging to a man who had died twenty-five years before?

But she heard neither. Instead there came a familiar sound, a sound she knew well but which tonight made her feel as though an icy hand were laid on her heart. A fumbling at the front door. . . .

It came again. And then a cold blast seemed to sweep through the room. Mrs. Harter had now no doubt what her sensations were. She was afraid. She was more than afraid, she was terrified.

And suddenly there came to her the thought: *"Twenty-five years is a long time. Patrick is a stranger to me now."*

Terror! That was what was invading her.

A soft step outside the door, a soft, halting footstep. Then the door swung silently open.

Mrs. Harter staggered to her feet, swaying slightly from side to side, her eyes fixed on the open doorway,

something slipped from her fingers into the grate.

SHE gave a strangled cry which died in her throat. In the dim light of the doorway stood a familiar figure with chestnut beard and whiskers and an old-fashioned Victorian coat.

Patrick had come for her!

Her heart gave one terrified leap and stood still. She slipped to the ground in a huddled heap.

There Elizabeth found her an hour later.

Doctor Meynell was called at once and Charles Ridgeway was hastily recalled from his bridge party. But nothing could be done. Mrs. Harter had gone beyond human aid.

It was not until two days later that Elizabeth remembered the note given to her by her mistress. Doctor Meynell read it with great interest and showed it to Charles Ridgeway.

"A very curious coincidence," he said. It seems clear that your aunt had been having hallucinations about her dead husband's voice. She must have strung herself up to such a point that the excitement was fatal and when the time actually came she died of the shock."

"Auto-suggestion?" said Charles.

"Something of the sort. I will let you know the result of the autopsy as soon as possible, though I have no doubt of it myself. In the circumstances, an autopsy was desirable, though purely as a matter of form."

Charles nodded comprehendingly.

On the preceding night, when the household was in bed, he had removed a certain wire which ran from the back of the wireless cabinet to his bedroom on the floor above. Also, since the evening had been a chilly one, he had asked Elizabeth to light a fire in his room, and in that fire he had burned a chestnut beard and whiskers. Some Victorian clothing belonging to his late uncle he replaced in the camphor-scented chest in the attic.

As far as he could see, he was perfectly safe. His plan, the shadowy outline of which had first formed in his brain when Doctor Meynell had told him that his aunt might, with due care, live for many years, had succeeded admirably. A sudden shock, Doctor Meynell had said. Charles, that affectionate young man, beloved of old ladies, smiled to himself.

WHEN the doctor had departed, Charles went about his duties mechanically. Certain funeral arrangements had to be finally settled. Relatives coming from a distance had to have trains taken care of for them. In one or two cases they would have to stay the night. Charles went about it all efficiently and methodically, to the accompaniment of an undercurrent of his own thoughts.

A very good stroke of business! That was the burden of them. Nobody, least of all his dead aunt, had known in what perilous straits Charles stood. His activities, carefully concealed from the world, had landed him where the shadow of a prison loomed ahead.

Exposure and ruin had stared him in the face unless he could in a few short months raise a considerable sum of money. Well, that was all right now. Charles smiled to himself. Thanks to—yes, call it a practical joke. Nothing criminal about *that.* He was saved. He was now a very rich man. He had no anxieties on the subject, for Mrs. Harter had never made any secret of her intentions.

Chiming in very appositely with these thoughts, Elizabeth put her head round the door and informed him that Mr. Hopkinson was here and would like to see him.

About time, too, Charles thought.

Repressing a tendency to whistle, he composed his face to one of suitable gravity and repaired to the library. There he greeted the precise old gentleman who had been for over a quarter of a century the late Mrs. Harter's legal adviser.

The lawyer seated himself at Charles's invitation and with a dry little cough entered upon business matters.

"I did not quite understand your letter to me, Mr. Ridgeway. You seemed to be under the impression that the late Mrs. Harter's will was in our keeping?"

Charles stared at him.

"But surely, I've heard my aunt say as much."

"Oh! quite so, quite so. It *was* in our keeping."

"*Was?*"

"That is what I said. Mrs. Harter wrote to us, asking that it might be forwarded to her on Tuesday last."

An uneasy feeling crept over Charles. He felt a far-off premonition of unpleasantness.

"Doubtless it will come to light amongst her papers," continued the lawyer smoothly.

CHARLES said nothing. He was afraid to trust his tongue. He had already been through Mrs. Harter's papers pretty thoroughly, well enough to be quite certain that no will was amongst them. In a minute or two, when he had regained control of himself, he said so. His voice sounded unreal to himself, and he had a sensation as of cold water trickling down his back.

"Has anyone been through her personal effects?" asked the lawyer.

Charles replied that her own maid, Elizabeth, had done so. At Mr. Hopkinson's suggestion, Elizabeth was sent for. She came promptly, grim and upright, and answered the questions put to her.

She had been through all her mistress's clothes and personal belongings. She was quite sure that there had been no legal document such as a *will* amongst them. She knew what *the will* looked like; her poor mistress had had it in her hand only the morning of her death.

"You are sure of that?" asked the lawyer sharply.

"Yes, sir. She told me so. And she made me take fifty pounds in notes. The will was in a long blue envelope."

"Quite right," said Mr. Hopkinson.

"Now I come to think of it," continued Elizabeth, "that same blue envelope was lying on this table the morning after, but empty. I laid it on the desk."

"I remember seeing it there," said Charles.

He got up and went over to the desk. In a minute or two he turned around with an envelope in his hand which he handed to Mr. Hopkinson. The latter examined it and nodded his head.

"That is the envelope in which I dispatched the will on Tuesday last."

Both men looked hard at Elizabeth.

"Is there anything more, sir?" she inquired respectfully.

"Not at present, thank you."

Elizabeth went toward the door.

"One minute," said the lawyer. "Was there a fire in the grate that evening?"

"Yes, sir, there was always a fire."

"Thank you, that will do."

Elizabeth went out. Charles leaned forward, resting a shaking hand on the table.

"What do you think? What are you driving at?"

Mr. Hopkinson shook his head.

"We must still hope the will may turn up. If it does not——"

"Well, if it does not?"

"I am afraid there is only one conclusion possible. Your aunt sent for

that will in order to destroy it. Not wishing Elizabeth to lose by that, she gave her the amount of her legacy in cash."

"But why?" cried Charles wildly. "Why?"

Mr. Hopkinson coughed—a dry cough.

"You have had no—er—disagreement with your aunt, Mr. Ridgeway?" he murmured.

Charles gasped.

"No indeed," he cried warmly. "We were on the kindliest, most affectionate terms right up to the end."

"Ah!" said Mr. Hopkinson, not looking at him.

It came to Charles with a shock that the lawyer did not believe him. Who knew what this dry old stick might not have heard? Rumors of Charles's doings might have come round to him. What more natural than that he should suppose that these same rumors had come to Mrs. Harter, and that aunt and nephew should have had an altercation on the subject.

But it wasn't so! Charles knew one of the bitterest moments of his career. His lies had been believed. Now that he spoke the truth, belief was withheld. The irony of it!

Of course, his aunt had never burnt the will. Of course——

His thoughts came to a sudden check. What was that picture rising before his eyes? An old lady with one hand clasped to her heart . . . something slipping . . . a paper . . . falling on the red hot embers. . . .

Charles's face grew livid. He heard a hoarse voice, his own, asking:

"If that will's never found——?"

"There is a former will of Mrs. Harter's still extant, dated September, 1920. By it, Mrs. Harter leaves everything to her niece, Miriam Harter, now Miriam Robinson."

What was the old fool saying? Miriam? Miriam with her nondescript husband, and her four whining brats. All his cleverness, for Miriam.

The telephone rang sharply at his elbow. He took up the receiver. It was the doctor's voice, hearty and kindly.

"That you, Ridgeway? Thought you'd like to know. The autopsy's just concluded. Cause of death as I surmised. But as a matter of fact the cardiac trouble was much more serious than I suspected when she was alive. With the utmost care, she couldn't have lived longer than two months, at the outside. Thought you'd like to know. Might console you more or less."

"Excuse me," said Charles, "would you mind saying that again?"

"She couldn't have lived longer than two months," said the doctor, in a slightly louder tone. "All things work out for the best, you know, my dear fellow."

But Charles had slammed back the receiver on its hook. He was conscious of the lawyer's voice speaking from a long way off:

"Dear me, Mr. Ridgeway, are you ill?"

Damn them all! The smug-faced lawyer; that poisonous old ass, Meynell. No hope in front of him; only the shadow of the prison wall.

He felt that somebody had been playing with him, playing with him like a cat with a mouse. Somebody must be laughing. . . .

The Most Mysterious Happening in My Life

As related by A. L. ERLANGER

(The Napoleon of Producers)

To BIDE DUDLEY

[This is the third of a series of genuine mystery stories, from the lives of famous people of the stage and screen.]

WHEN a small boy in an Ohio City, A. L. Erlanger had no thought of ever becoming a noted theatrical magnate. At the age of twelve, when, because of his restless nature, he left school and sought work, he had no idea of entering upon any sort of a definite career. His one desire was to earn money. Any job a small boy could handle would do. He found one as office boy for an attorney.

"The law had no lure for me," said Mr. Erlanger recently, as I sat across his desk in his office. "In fact, I didn't know what law was. I took the job because it paid me $3 a week and that was a lot of money for a youngster of my age. My duties were not dissimilar to those of boys in theatrical offices nowadays. I had to meet the callers and announce them to the lawyer.

"My employer was a pompous man, impressed with his own importance, if any. Often I would hear him talking with clients, or prospective clients, and he never overlooked a chance to impress them with the fact that he was a big man—in his own mind, anyway. More than that, he used to say he had high ideals.

"One time I heard him telling a man he never would have anything to do with divorce cases. He said he considered them beneath his dignity. He was talking just for effect, I learned later, but his statement impressed me and I remembered it so well it cost me my job.

"The lawyer had a friend who was a chemist. Occasionally the friend would drop in and induce my boss to go out to a nearby club for a bite to eat, or a game of billiards. He was absent with the chemist one day when a beautiful woman, about twenty years old, came into the office and asked to see him. I told her he was out and asked the nature of her business. She said she wanted legal advice. The lawyer had told me never to overlook details, so I asked what sort of a case hers was. She hesitated a moment and then said she wished to sue for a divorce. Im-

mediately I explained to her that the lawyer would have nothing to do with divorce suits.

"'But I'm sure he will for me,' she said.

"'I'm sure he won't,' I replied.

"'Boy,' she snapped, 'you don't know what you're talking about.' With that she left, rather in a huff. Half an hour later the lawyer came in.

"'Anybody here to see me?' he asked.

"'Just one caller—a lady,' I replied. 'She wanted to talk to you about a divorce, but I told her you wouldn't handle a case of that sort, so she went away without leaving her name.

"The lawyer was furious. 'Since when,' he demanded, 'did you assume the responsibility of selecting my clients for me?'

"'Well,' I replied, 'I heard you saying you wouldn't handle divorce cases and thought you meant it.'

"'You're fired, at the end of this week,' he snorted.

"'You're wrong,' I replied, grabbing my hat. 'I'm fired now.'

"I went out and immediately began looking for another job. I found one as a minor theatre attaché and that was my start in the amusement business. But now for my one and only mystery!

"Twenty years ago, here in New York, a woman came to see me. She gave the name of Helen Graham, which meant nothing to me, and yet I had a sort of an intuition it was not her right one. She said she wanted to try acting.

"'But,' I said, 'aren't you beginning rather late in life? You must be past forty-five years of age.'

"'I am just forty,' she replied. My real impression was that she was about fifty.

"'Well, that isn't too old,' I said. 'But character rôles are the sort you should try for.

"'Yes,' she said eagerly, 'I want character rôles.'

"'I'm sorry I haven't anything to offer you,' I said, 'but I'll keep you in mind if you will leave your address with my secretary outside.'

"'But, Mr. Erlanger,' she pleaded, 'you can make a place for me in one of your companies. I can do the serious drama, I'm sure. Can't you give me a part in, well, a divorce play, for instance?'

"The word 'divorce' gave me a start. Her face had seemed a bit familiar since she first entered the room and I had been obsessed with the idea I had seen her before, somewhere. The word, however, flashed the true picture across my mind. She was the woman who had applied for my lawyer boss' aid and who, indirectly, had been the cause of my being discharged. I decided not to recall the old days, but she began to stir up unusual interest in my mind.

"'Why do you want to act a divorce rôle?' I asked, casually.

"'Oh—er—I consider such parts so human,' she replied. Then gaining courage, she said: 'I am the wife of a prominent attorney in a New England city. Maybe it is because I hear him talk so much about divorce cases he handles that I am so eager to play a divorce rôle.'

"I was studying her. She babbled on. 'My husband is wealthy,' she said. 'If you wanted him to, I'm sure he would put money into a play in which I had a good rôle.'

"'What is his name?' I asked.

"'That I cannot tell,' she replied. 'He has made me promise not to reveal his identity in connection with my stage aspirations. Helen Graham is the professional name I have selected—Miss Helen Graham.'

"'All right, Miss Graham,' I said. 'I believe you could act a divorce

rôle. Now I'm a man of action. I'll have a play here next Tuesday at 3 o'clock. Come in and I'll read it to you. Then we'll see what can be done about a production. Will you leave your address?'

"'No, but I'll be here Tuesday at 3,' she replied. Then she thanked me profusely and left. She was hardly out of the building when I telephoned a young playwright who was under obligations to me and with whom I was very friendly.

"John,' I said, 'come over and see me immediately, if you can. I want you to do me a favor.'

"Without asking questions, he hurried to my office. To him I outlined a play and asked him to write a synopsis of it and have it on my desk the following Tuesday, at noon. He promised he would, and away he went."

HERE Mr. Erlanger stopped talking and, lighting a fresh cigar, handed me one.

"You smoke a lot of cigars, don't you?" I asked.

"Plenty of them—cigars, not cigarettes. Just note that fact. It may have something to do with my story. Are you interested in what I've been telling you?"

"Very much!"

Thomas, Mr. Erlanger's Man Friday, entered at this juncture and announced that several people were waiting in the outer office to see him.

"They'll have to wait," said Mr. Erlanger. Then he continued his story.

"She came in Tuesday at 3 and I had the synopsis, asked her to be seated and was about to begin reading when she said:

"'Wait! Please give me just an idea of the story before you read it. I want to be prepared to assimilate it thoroughly.'

"'All right,' I answered. 'This is a story of a very good-looking young married woman in a city of the Middle West. She wants a divorce in order to marry another man. He has a wife. She goes to a lawyer's office to retain the attorney as her counsel, but he is not in. There she encounters an office boy about twelve years old, who tells her his employer never handles divorce cases. She protests he will take hers, but the boy insists he won't. At that she shows anger and flounces out. The lawyer, who has been at his club with a chemist, whom he knows well, comes in after a while and, on hearing of the boy's action, fires him. Then—.'

"'Just a moment!' the woman said, looking startled. 'Who wrote this play, Mr. Erlanger?'

"'John Barnes," I replied, inventing a name on the spur of the moment. I saw no reason to drag the young playwright into my scheme.

"'Well—was he ever employed by a lawyer as office boy?'

"'Not that I know of. Shall I proceed?'

"'Please do,' she replied, regaining her composure to a certain extent.

"'The lawyer, it turns out, is particularly angry at the boy because——' I hesitated for the effect of suspense.

"'Yes—yes!" she almost shouted. "For what reason?"

"Because he, the lawyer, is in love with the young woman who wants the divorce. In fact, he has been her lover for some time and has been urging her to let him get her a divorce decree. She had been hesitating, but that day had made up her mind to let him go ahead. The lawyer's idea was to have the woman for himself, alone.' Again I stopped.

"'Please!' she said semi-hysterically, please tell me the rest.'

"I was very calm. My plan—merely one of satisfying my curiosity—was working out marvelously. I had followed the course of my lawyer boss through the newspapers and had developed ideas of my own regarding several incidents in his life. But I had never known how far his affair with the woman had gone.

"'After the office boy is fired,' I continued, 'the lawyer takes the case and wins her a decree. It is a routine suit and attracts little or no attention. A month later the lawyer's wife dies. She is found dead in a chair in her home. Cigarettes were new in those days and women did not smoke. However, there was a box of some sort of medicinal cigarettes on the table near her and one had been partially smoked. It was understood she had a cold in her head. This point can be cleared up before rehearsals begin.'

"She was gazing at me, deeply awed. 'Now, in the play,' I continued, 'the lawyer moves to an Eastern city. There comes the fair divorcee and they are married, quietly. Later she develops a desire to go on the stage and——.'

She sprang to her feet. "Who are you?' she demanded.

"'Abraham L. Erlanger is my name,' I replied with a smile.

"No! No! I don't mean that. Who *are* you? It couldn't have been the playwright. He knows nothing of—of—well, who are YOU?"

"'Look at me closely,' I said. 'Try to turn back the years and see if you don't recognize me.'

"She gazed at me steadily for a full minute. Then pointing a gloved finger at me, she said: 'You are that office boy.'

"'And you,' I replied, 'are that woman.'

"She gulped. 'I'm not,' she shouted. 'I'm Helen Graham.'

"Turning, she rushed out of the office and I have never seen her since."

"Why didn't you have a detective learn her identity?" I asked.

"What for? I assumed she had married the lawyer and was still married to him. I had had my fun with the synopsis. I had tried several hunches in it and I am positive they all proved good."

"And you never heard from her?"

"I'm not sure whether I did or not."

Mr. Erlanger took an old-fashioned box of cigarettes out of his desk drawer. One of the ten "smokes" was missing.

"These cigarettes were mailed me about a week after the woman left. You'll notice one is gone."

"You sampled them, eh?"

"Not on your life! That one went to a chemist. An analysis proved that my pet hunches were sound.

"And there's the mystery—Who sent me these cigarettes?"

The fourth story of this series will be told by

DAVID BELASCO,

The Wizard of the Drama

It will appear in our next issue, out March 15.

Blackie Wins 289 Years

By THOMAS TOPHAM

"THIS," said a guard, stopping with two visitors and pointing with his cane, "is our most famous prisoner, Blackie McGonigle. He's doing two hundred and ninety years for a series of highway robberies that terrorized half the state."

Blackie McGonigle, No. 23,342 on the prison records, stood at a machine in the shoe shop stitching on soles with large hands that had once held two guns, and the muscles of his neck swelled as he heard himself described much like a wild animal in a zoo. He darted a malignant glance at the guard, but he went on stitching soles, albeit he missed one of the soles and almost ruined a shoe.

"Two hundred and ninety years?" gasped one of the visitors.

"Yep, he's doing it all several times over," the guard replied.

"Doing it all?" asked the interested visitor.

"That means life," explained the guard easily. "You see, a fellow who gets life is generally referred to as 'doing it all.' In Blackie's case, they don't know how to name it. He's the joke of the penitentiary."

Blackie growled in his throat, but the growl was lost in the whir of machinery.

"Is he—is he a desperate prisoner?" asked the visitor.

"Best we have," declared the guard enthusiastically. "These tough birds are generally our honor men. Funny, too, because they have little to gain except a few privileges granted for good behavior. Now, Blackie there, by good behavior, could get about a hundred and fifty years knocked off." The guard stopped to chuckle over his joke.

"One hundred an' twenty year an' two months," croaked Blackie, breaking the rule about talking without permission.

"Probably correct," agreed the guard, ignoring the infraction of rules, and with his visitors in tow he passed on to exhibit the other interesting side shows of the prison.

Blackie looked after the guard and the visitors, then picked up several shoes and took them to the "heel" man. In the interval of placing the shoes on the "heel" man's bench, Blackie cautiously gave vent to his embittered feelings.

"It's the limit, Jake," said Blackie out of the corner of his mouth, without moving a muscle of his face. "They're a-pointin' me out as the boob who gits the prize jolt, an' laughin' about it. But 'tain't legal. My lawyer says 'tain't. He says they can't give a guy more'n life."

Mr. Blackie McGonigle was right. It wasn't legal to hand a man so many consecutive sentences that they totaled two hundred and ninety years,

so at great expense to the taxpayers they took him out and back to court to straighten out the snarl.

The desperado was greatly heartened when he heard the news that his sentence was to be readjusted. He had the wild hope that he would walk from the court a free man, perhaps with an apology from the judge. But he went back to his cell in state's prison a sadly disillusioned man as to the operation of the law.

"What'd the judge do, Blackie?" eagerly asked Skippy Pete, his cellmate, when they were alone in their double cell after Blackie had returned from his excursion.

Blackie swore cautiously but roundly.

"Do?" he said. "Why, the big stiff knocked off two hundred an' ten years, leavin' me eighty to do. I like to fainted. An' he says, says he, the big fourflusher, he says, 'Mr. McGonigle, by good behavior, you should get that reduced an' come forth a free an' better man.' "

Blackie's face worked convulsively. Skippy Pete snickered.

"How old are you now?" asked Pete.

"Forty-one," said Blackie.

"An' how soon could you git out?" Pete inquired.

"I ain't figured it out, but about fifty-year, I reckon," groaned Blackie. "Good God, I'd be pretty near a hundred years old. An' I never kilt a soul in all the time I was a-stickin' 'em up. Not a soul. I run away a couple times to keep from shootin' anybody."

"Me, I shoot 'em," boasted Skippy Pete. "I bumped off a couple guys who got fresh. An I'd bump off some more if I could git out."

BLACKIE sat down on his bunk and pulled his little stool to him. He fished a ragged piece of paper from under the mattress and retrieved a stub pencil from his shoe, for a convict has no pockets in his clothes.

"Now," said Blackie, writing the figure '80' on his piece of paper, "What's this here rule about figurin' out time off? I never did git her straight."

"For sentences of five years or more," quoted Pete glibly, "you multiply the number of years by seven, add eight, divide by twelve, and the result is the time you must serve, provided you're a real good cuckoo."

"If I could git on the road gang," said Blackie, "that'd mean a day off for every day worked. Then with credit for bein' good——"

"Back up, bo," cut in Pete. "You can't git good behavior credits an' road gang too."

Blackie was much disgusted with Skippy Pete's interpretation of the credit rules. Credits was always a debatable subject, giving rise to endless and futile arguments among the prisoners. Blackie lapsed into deep silence and figured industriously for an hour, while Pete read the scrap of a newspaper that he had obtained by bargaining tobacco with another convict.

"Well, Pete," said Blackie, looking up with a weary sigh, "the best I kin git out of it is this: I can't ask for parole for about twenty-seven years, mebbe more, an' they ain't no chance to git on the road gang, anyway, but if I keep all the damn rules I oughta be kissin' the warden goodby in forty-seven year an' four months."

But Pete threw another monkey-wrench into Blackie's elaborate computations.

"Your sentences are consecutive, one after another, ain't they?" asked Pete.

"Yeah," said Blackie, startled. "Four of twenty-year each, but what's that got to do with it? They make eighty in all, don't they?"

"They make eighty, all right,"

agreed Pete, "but they's another rule says where they's a bunch stringin' along like that, they don't git so much credits."

"You're a liar!" snarled Blackie. "I betcha if I served forty-seven year an' four months they'd let me out."

"Le's see your figures," said Pete with interest, but at that point the lights went out and Blackie was left in darkness with his stub pencil and his calculations. They both growled at the cell-house captain who was too lazy to ring the gong five minutes before "lights out." It was Blackie's night to sleep in the upper bunk. He divested himself of his shoes and his outer clothes and swung up. Then he leaned his chin over the edge and hissed at Pete:

"They's only one thing to do. I'm goin' to escape."

"Now you're talkin'," hissed back Pete in the darkness. "See you tomorrow."

LONG, Blackie laid and gritted his teeth and sent curses up through the darkness. A night guard came through the corridor, flashed his light into the cell and passed on. Blackie continued to glare into the darkness. And out of the darkness the plan came to him. It was so simple that he wondered he had not thought of it before. His mind visioned the whole plan.

In the rear of the shoe shop where he worked was a large door through which supplies were taken into the shop. It opened into the yard where railway cars were switched for the prison. The door was barred on the outside by an iron bar. If he could contrive to get rid of that iron bar, he and two or three desperate men could wait until a switch engine was in the yard, burst out the door, seize the switch engine and crash through the big gate, which was always closed as soon as the engine had passed through.

It was not a new scheme. The same thing had been worked before, only at that time convicts were allowed to come and go where the switch engine was standing. Now, when the engine was there, the yard into which the track led was cleared of convicts and the doors from the shops kept closed.

With infinite caution Blackie laid his plans. Blackie was to steal a bar as nearly like the one on the door as possible. This would be partly sawed through, the crack puttied and blackened, then substituted for the bar on the door. As the door was infrequently opened there was the great chance that the bar would not be detected. Skippy Pete was, at a signal, to go to the lone shop guard on his little platform and whack him over the head with a club. Then he and the chosen ones would crash through the door held by the frail bar, seize the engine and go dashing away.

Bit by bit the plan was formulated. It took two months to get every detail worked out. Blackie stole the bar and sawed it as he stood at his machine under the guard's nose. Skippy Pete, by an adroit errand to the unloading yard, succeeded in placing it. And then, with everything ready, the great day came, under ideal conditions. The switch engine snorted into the unloading yard pushing a car of material, and Blackie gave the signal for the break.

Skippy Pete was on the guard before he could sound an alarm and the guard went down under his club. Four men in the shoe shop leaped from their machines and at the door. The frail bar gave way.

Blackie McGonigle started to leap, too, but his heavy shoe caught between a foot lever of his machine and a support. He gave a tug. The foot remained. Frantically, he reached

down and tried to jerk the shoe loose with his hand but it refused to budge. He jerked at the clasps of his shoe, but the foot was jammed inside.

THERE were outcries in the yard. A moment later Blackie heard the crash of the engine against the gate, heard the locomotive go careening down the track outside. His carefully laid plan had been successful so far, and he was held by the foot with forty-seven years and four months hanging over him.

And then as guards swarmed into the shop, Blackie's foot came free from its vise as easily as if it had never been caught. The convict could hardly believe it. He was so fascinated by his ill-luck that he stood stupidly and gazed at his freed foot until a guard nudged him roughly.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said the guard. "I thought sure you'd be in that break."

Blackie gulped back the tears, but he made the best of the situation.

"Nix," he replied thickly. "I ain't pullin' that kinda stuff."

"Well, fall in line there," ordered the guard, and with the others he was marched to his cell, to be locked up until the excitement of the break was over.

Up and down section C of the prison the news of the "break' was telegraphed. Skippy Pete and his three companions had made a clean getaway. The desperate break had been the most successful the prison had ever experienced.

Blackie McGonigle, with eighty years ahead of him, forty-seven if he behaved, listened to the news as it was tick-tacked and whispered from cell to cell, and he lay in his bunk and wept. Skippy Pete, his cellmate, was far away by that time, and Blackie longed to be with him. And it was his own scheme, too, planned by him in every detail.

The next day Blackie McGonigle was the center of all eyes in the shoe shop. Convict nudged convict and in blank-faced whispers wondered "Why the hell Blackie wasn't in the rush?" It was inconceivable that Skippy Pete, his cellmate, had not taken him into the project.

TWO days later Blackie McGonigle was summoned to the warden's office. He went in fear and trepidation, certain that at least one of the escaped convicts had been recaptured and had "snitched" of his part in the affair.

"McGonigle," asked the warden, "why didn't you make a break with the other men from the shoe shop?"

Convict No. 23,342 shifted from one foot to another.

"I ain't pullin' that kinda stuff," said Blackie. "I'm reformin'."

"Yes?" said the warden, a faint smile playing around his lips. The warden shuffled some papers on his desk. Let's see, your sentence was reduced from two hundred and ninety years to eighty, wasn't it? And your record here says you've served seven months with no demerits except one for talking too loud in your cell. Well, you should get out in about fifty years at that rate."

"About that," agreed Blackie, "unless you'll send me over to the road camp."

"No chance!" barked the warden. "But I will do this. Your example in not joining that gang in the break prevented several others, in fact the whole shop, from trying to stampede. The guards who came up reported that they found you standing quietly beside your machine, making no effort to get away. Now, you knew the break was coming, didn't you?"

Blackie looked the warden in the eye.

"Sure I knew it was comin', some time," he said with every appearance of candor. "They're always talkin'

about such things, you know that. An' when she come, they yelled to me to join in, but I tell you I ain't pullin' that kinda stuff."

"I wish I knew how far to believe you," said the warden. "Anyhow, you did the right thing and I'm going to reward you. In a case like yours, where it's a flat series of four sentences to run consecutively, it's complicated. I've studied over what can be done, and the best I can think of is to ask the pardon board to commute each sentence to fifteen years, which would make it sixty years in all. That would make you free in thirty-five years and eligible to parole earlier. And, McGonigle, if you hear of any more such things going on, why—er—a word to me or the deputy would go a long way in getting your jolt further reduced."

Plainly the warden was bidding for Convict No. 23,342 to become one of his stool pigeons. Quick rage welled up in Blackie. He might be a highwayman, but he held himself far above being a "stoolie." However, he kept control of his anger and gulped twice before he answered.

"Yessir," said Blackie meekly. "Of course, I don't hear much, havin' cut out the gang, you might say."

"Very well," said the warden. "I was just suggesting it in case you did hear anything. But anyhow, I'm pretty certain you'll get the reduction I spoke of."

BITTERLY disappointed, Blackie returned to stitching shoe soles. When the warden began talking of reward, he had hoped ardently that he could get on the road gang, where escape was comparatively easy. He felt better next day when he was transferred to a job as "heeler," where he could sit down and had many minutes rest. And there, too, he had others near to whom he could talk. He was busily pounding away at a heel late one afternoon when his neighbor, leaning over, rasped:

"They ketched Skippy Pete an' he's in the hole."

Blackie leaned back in his seat and a "gone" feeling hit him in the pit of the stomach.

"Did he snitch?" asked Blackie, fear in his heart that if Pete had told the full details of the escape, he, Blackie, would lose even the poor consolation of having twenty years taken off his eighty-year sentence. The pardon board had formally ratified the reduction, and Blackie wondered if they could take it back. But his fear was unfounded.

"Naw," said his informant. "Pete kept mum an' that's the reason he's in the hole. If he'd peached, they'd have treated him like a lady. But say, bo, he's out to get you."

It was true, Blackie learned later. Skippy Pete, his one-time cellmate and fellow conspirator, was in the dungeon, having been recaptured back in his old city haunts whither he had drifted after his successful escape. And Skippy Pete was sending out dire threats, even from the depths of the dungeon, that he would "get" Blackie McGonigle. Pete had the firm belief that Blackie, by failing to join in that break that he had himself planned, had attempted to betray all involved; that he was, in fact, a stool pigeon of the meanest type, one who led others into trouble; "framed" them.

Day after day convicts edged up to Blackie, and believing, too, that he was in the confidence of the warden, told him of Skippy Pete's threats to kill him.

In the course of time, Skippy Pete came out of the "hole" and became a dishonored member of the bum gang, that did the menial work about the prison. Always the bum gang was under the eye of high-power guards who shot easily and accurately. Most

of the gang wore red shirts to distinguish them as desperate prison-breakers, who should be shot first in case of trouble.

Blackie, desperate highwayman himself, quailed at the prospect before him. He knew only too well what Pete would do. Some day, when he was in line or in a crowd, Pete would plunge a sharpened file into his back and step away in the excitement. No one would dare tell on Pete, his reputation was enough to assure safety.

Blackie shuddered whenever he was ordered into line, sighed with relief when he was locked safely in his cell at night. He got into the habit of carrying a hammer from the shoe shop, stuck in the waistband of his trousers. Some day he would be "frisked" by a guard or the hammer found in his cell and he would acquire a string of demerits, but he took that chance in his anxiety to protect his life.

The attack of Skippy Pete did not come as Blackie had expected. Pete was sent over to the shoe shop to scrub up the place. Slouching down the line of machines, he beheld Blackie McGonigle bent over his heels. Pete reached for his sharpened file and, hidden by the machines, slipped toward Blackie, fairly sure of his prey.

He could stab Blackie as he sat there and make a clean escape by cutting swiftly back up the line of machines. Pete overlooked only one point. In his eagerness he failed to notice whether the guard was on his platform or on the floor. Just as he crouched to slip upon the unsuspecting Blackie, the guard, close at hand, called sharply.

ENRAGED at the interference, Pete turned swiftly on the guard, leaped toward him and Blackie, aroused by the guard's first call, leaped forward at the same instant. Blackie's hammer crashed on Pete's shaven head as Pete's arm was raised to strike the dumbfounded guard, and Pete dropped to the floor with a badly cracked skull.

Then Blackie, shivering at his own narrow escape, sat down in his seat and folded his arms like an obedient prisoner in time of trouble.

Skippy Pete didn't die, for which Blackie was sincerely sorry. He knew now that his goose was cooked so far as Skippy Pete and Pete's particular crowd was concerned. He had saved a hated "screw" from death, and even though by his act he had saved Skippy Pete from the gallows, he felt that he was a marked man in the prison. Much as he rebelled, he knew that he would be classed among the upholders of law and order, and even the expected call before the warden failed to cheer his spirits.

"No. 23,342," said the warden as Blackie stood before him, "for the second time I have to commend you for your conduct. I may say that I am surprised, for you came in here with a record as the most desperate man who had ever been sent to us."

"Yessir," said Blackie meekly.

"Let's see," said the warden, shuffling familiar papers before him, "your sentence of two hundred ninety years was cut to eighty, then for refusing to escape, the eighty was cut to sixty. For your action in saving an officer's life the pardon board has accepted my recommendation and has, with the consent of the governor, commuted that to twenty-five years. In other words, the board has readjusted your sentence so that by actually serving fifteen years and three months your sentence would be completed."

"Yessir," said Blackie, without enthusiasm. Fifteen years seemed like an eternity.

"But the board has done better than

that," went on the warden. "In the case of one sentenced for fifty years or over, the rule is that parole will not be considered until twenty years are served. Having reduced your sentence the board has waived this rule and arranged it that when you have served ten years you will be eligible to parole."

"Yessir," said Blackie McGonigle and marched out, convinced that he would never live out the ten years. He hadn't intended to save any officer's life, had acted to save himself from Skippy Pete, and getting reductions on his sentence did not make him feel any too happy. It would certainly make Skippy Pete savage.

But, to the surprise of Blackie, Skippy Pete came out of the dungeon after a long sentence in solitude without any bitterness. He attempted to make friends with Blackie. Blackie eagerly met Pete more than halfway. He encountered Pete one day as Pete was scrubbing a corner of the shoe shop and Pete grinned amiably.

"Quits," said Pete. "On the square."

"Sure," said Blackie. "You had me all wrong."

"On same job?" asked Pete.

"One more week, then slum slinger," Blackie informed him, for Blackie had won further reward for his good conduct and had been assigned to the enviable work of waiter in the mess hall. Only the most trusted of the prisoners were assigned that duty and they must have proved their trustworthiness more than once.

But Pete said nothing derogatory to Blackie, nothing that would indicate he thought Blackie was becoming a common stool pigeon. In gratitude Blackie went out of his way to slip Pete a double dose of molasses at breakfast whenever he happened to be waiting on Pete's particular section. He even went so far as to remove the flies before he poured it in Pete's pan.

Soon the object of Skippy Pete's amiability became apparent. In a roundabout way, through Blackie's new cellmate, "Crusty" Hopkins, Pete sounded Blackie on whether he was ripe for a new adventure in escaping. Crusty strongly urged upon Blackie the benefits to be secured. Ten years were ten long years in Crusty's estimation. His own sentence was only five and yet he was willing to cut that to nothing.

Blackie turned over the proposal in his mind. He discussed and re-discussed the project with Crusty, had one quiet little talk with Pete back of the storehouse wherein Pete laid out the plan.

The attempt was to be made in the mess hall at breakfast. Pete had revolvers, five of them, stored in an old drain, and two sticks of dynamite smuggled from outside. Blackie's part was simple but necessary to success. Twice a week they had meat stew, commonly called *slumgullion,* for breakfast. Upon one of these mornings when he entered the mess hall, Blackie was to go down the line serving the stew until he reached the floor guard in his section.

At that point he was to dash a ladle of the hot stew in the face of the guard. The five convicts in the plot would then leap for the kitchen before the armed guards in the gun cages on the walls could shoot. There they would overpower the lone kitchen guard, take him along as a shield, dodge into a covered runway leading to the shops, break through the shoe shop into the unloading yard, pop-off the one guard there at that hour of the morning, dynamite the gate, grab a prison truck left there overnight and ride forth to liberty.

Pete assured Blackie that each man would have his revolver and he would have two, one for Blackie.

BLACKIE mulled over the scheme. The only weak spot, to his mind, was the guard in the unloading yard. Blackie dreaded to see him killed, and tried to devise a scheme that would eliminate that feature. None seemed feasible. The ten years loomed up like a century. Blackie threw himself heart and soul into the plot to escape.

There was tenseness in the air as the morning for the attempted prison break dawned. Blackie watched through the kitchen door as the "hardboiled egg" line marched into the mess hall. They were always seated first, served first and sent out to their labors. Experience had shown that allowing them to wait caused trouble. They were likely to begin rioting if breakfast was delayed.

Blackie saw Skippy Pete take his seat, saw him give the signal, four shakes of his head sidewise, that everything was ready. The next step would be hot stew in the face of the guard.

Blackie stepped to the kitchen with a bucket and waited while an assistant cook ladled out the stew. He picked up the bucket.

"Say," said a low voice at his elbow as he reached for the stew, "something's gonna break in there." It was the weazened little old potato peeler, a lifer, called *Susan Jane* in the prison because he sang a song of that name.

"Huh?" said the surprised Blackie.

"You keep out, see," said the potato peeler hurriedly. "Pete's got it all fixed to slip it into you."

"You're crazy," said Blackie, starting off from the little old man.

The potato peeler grabbed at his arm.

"I heard it all," he told Blackie. "He's gonna crack it to yuh. Take my tip, Blackie."

"Beat it there, you," ordered the chief cook, seeing Blackie soldiering on the job.

Blackie moved off, wondering. He knew Susan Jane was "tipping him off straight." Susan Jane was a man who accumulated all of the prison gossip, knew all the ins and outs of undercover conspiracies. If the warden knew half that Susan Jane did he would have to enlarge his dungeons. And Blackie knew why Susan Jane was telling him. He had never indulged in the pleasing kitchen pastime of teasing the little old potato peeler.

So that was Skippy Pete's game, getting his help and killing him? Blackie's mind raced, he began thinking of futile plans to "get" Pete first and still escape. He walked down the line of the table, slopping hot slumgullion recklessly into tin plates. He was almost to Pete. At the end of the table was the floor guard whose face was to receive one ladleful of hot stew.

BLACKIE reached Pete. Pete was leaning over his plate, awaiting the stew that he never expected to eat.

Blackie dished up a ladleful and reaching over, neatly poured the boiling liquid down the back of Pete's neck.

Skippy Pete made a mad claw for his neck, let out a terrific roar of mingled pain and amazement, whirled and tried to stand on his head to shake the burning slumgullion from his shirt. The only effect was to shake two revolvers and a knife from his clothes.

Blackie dropped to the floor in hopes the high power guards would miss him if they began shooting from their cages above. The three other convicts in the plot, seeing the leader acting as if he were crazy, hurriedly chucked their weapons away and joined the others in falling flat.

Floor guards hastily converged to

the point of trouble, batted Skippy Pete over the head with loaded canes and took control of the situation. They recovered the weapons of Pete, carted him to the hospital and within five minutes had the convicts marching from the mess hall back to their cells.

The guard who had been singled out for a ladleful of hot stew in his face grabbed Blackie McGonigle.

"I saw you pour that stew down that con's neck," swore the guard, but at that point the discovery of Pete's shaken-out weapons put such a dangerous light on the affair that the guard did not pursue his inquiry. The mess hall was searched and three more revolvers were discovered. The affair, the captain of the mess hall decided, merited the most searching investigation.

The warden ordered the captain to bring all the principals to his office. The principals, so far as any one knew, were Blackie, who had poured the stew, and Skippy Pete, the recipient of stew down his neck. Blackie was escorted in. Skippy Pete, in charge of two guards, showed up a few minutes later, his neck swathed in bandages and his head bound up where he had butted it on the floor and the guards had hit him.

"So you poured soup down Pete's —down No. 22,121's neck?" said the warden, fixing Blackie with his famous cold stare. "What did you do that for?"

"It was an accident," replied Blackie, a little sullenly. "I tripped an' the slumgullion jest sloshed that way."

"Uh-huh?" said the warden. "Now, No. 22,121, what were you doing with those two revolvers and that knife. They were seen falling from your clothes."

Skippy Pete, No. 22,121, blinked his eyes, but refused to open his mouth. The guard handed the warden a piece of paper.

"We found that on him in the hospital," he said.

The warden looked over the paper.

"Well, well," said the warden genially, "so one of your friends wrote this and you kept it for a souvenir, heh? Let's see. He says:

" 'Pete—Crusty and Bill and me all have our gats and the two for you is in the drain. I got the soup. All O. K.—Rathy.'

"Very kind of Rathy," continued the warden, "to let us in on all who were mixed up on the job."

Skippy Pete broke his silence with a hiss:

"Blackie there was in, too."

"He's not mentioned here," observed the warden, looking over the note again. "All right, you can go back to the hospital, and as soon as you are able you can join your friends in the hole, for about thirty days. After that, it's the rock quarry for you."

Pete faded from the scene with a guard on each side. The warden turned to Blackie. The warden was an old hand at judging criminals and he knew that Blackie had a part in the affair.

"All right," said the warden briskly, "what you got to say for yourself? Look out, now, don't get tangled up or you're likely to lose about all the credits you've earned on that two hundred and ninety years."

"I was in," confessed Blackie, "but at the last minute I poured that slumgullion down Pete's neck to bust up the whole racket."

"You busted it in good shape," said the warden dryly. "But what for?"

"Two reasons," said Blackie. "First was, I had it tipped off Pete was goin' to croak me at the last minute; second was, it was doped out to bump off

the guard on the gate, an' I ain't no killer. I would a-took my chance with Pete, mebbe got him first, but I couldn't stand to bump off that screw."

"Blackie," said the warden, "I believe you. You've got the makings of a man in you yet."

* * *

Down in the dungeon of the prison where offenders against rules were punished, a half dozen prisoners were turned into the corridor for the daily hour of exercise.

Skippy Pete reached the end of the corridor, turned and passed Crusty Hopkins.

"Hear about Blackie?" hissed Crusty.

"No," said Pete on the next turn.

"Pardon board cut his jolt to one year, road camp," said Crusty, as they met again.

"The big stiff," croaked Pete the next time.

"For double crossin' us," snarled Crusty.

Twice they passed again but a guard was watching.

"Two hundred an' eighty-nine years knocked off, all account of me," hissed Pete as the guard took his eyes away.

"Yah."

"An' all I git is slumgullion down me neck," said Pete.

"Yeah, an' a busted head."

The hour wore away. They were herded toward their cells. Pete was shoulder to shoulder with Crusty.

"Well, mebbe I'll have a chanct to make a gitaway now with Blackie outside," whispered Pete. "Two hundred an' eighty-nine years knocked off. 'Tain't fair."

And the solitary cell door clanked behind Skippy Pete.

Five Features in our Issue of March 15.

"The Most Mysterious Happening in My Life"
By DAVID BELASCO

"Sinister House"
By CHARLES G. BOOTH

"And the Fat Was In the Fire"
By DALE COLLINS

"The Spark of Life"
By GEORGE C. HENDERSON

"The Lost Canteen"
By LEMUEL de BRA

REMEMBER—Mystery Magazine is published TWICE A MONTH

A Little Matter of Style

JUST a few days ago, a young and really earnest writer of fiction asked me, in all seriousness and with some diffidence, if I objected to style. Thinking possibly that I had not heard aright, I suggested that the young man elucidate, and he said:

"I've been selling quite a few stories to a certain magazine, but, of late, the editor has been objecting to my style because it is, so he says, too literary. He insists that I change my style to suit his magazine or I can't sell him any more stuff." The young man paused and smiled faintly. "So I'm afraid I can't sell him any more stuff."

And I am still trying to solve the mystery of the editorial mind that objected to a contributor's style because it was too literary.

Unfortunately, this isn't a joke or a matter of no importance, because the young writer in question has a clean, simple, direct style that, as a general thing, takes years of arduous practice to acquire; the kind of style, by the way, that is conspicuously absent in the great majority of our very best sellers.

Perhaps this is the solution to the mystery. Perhaps the editor who objected to a too literary style did so under the impression that slovenliness has become a virtue and that simplicity is no longer the thing that pays. Or it may be that he is the kind of editor who believes it is necessary to edit his magazine *down* to his public.

In any event, I should like to assure readers of MYSTERY MAGAZINE that I have no objection to style. Possibly I should be more hesitant about making a confession of this sort, because I am a little afraid it isn't the kind of confession that is expected from the editor of a present-day fiction magazine. But, I've got to be truthful about it, even if it is old-fashioned.

Neither is it my intention to edit MYSTERY MAGAZINE *down* to its public. Nor will I say what I think of this form of editorial egotism. If I did, my remarks would be not only unethical, but also profanely unpleasant. So I'll just content myself with saying that MYSTERY MAGAZINE is being edited on a dead level with its readers.

This is not a high-brow level nor a low-brow level. It is nothing more than the level of the man or woman who likes a good story well told and a better story still better. It is the level of most of us. And the stories are selected because they are well written and well built; because they are the best of their kind I have been able to find, and because I like them and believe the reader will like them, too.

THE EDITOR.

Who Rideth Alone

By PERCIVAL C. WREN

Author of Beau Geste, The Wages of Virtue, Stepsons of France, etc.

A FOUR PART STORY—CONCLUSION

CHAPTER XXVII

TRIFLES

THE next morning the Emir, in the presence of the Vizier, granted an interview to Major Henri de Beaujolais. And thereafter the two rulers sat in council.

"He doesn't know us from Adam," said the Emir succinctly when the French officer had returned to his tent.

"Nor hardly from Eve," agreed the Vizier. "He ain't after us at all! *Inshallah!*"

The Emir grinned.

"We thought he had come gunning for us with half the French army, and he's come to bring us a million francs. It's a funny world."

"How much is a million francs?"

"Two hundred thousand dollars. *Some* jack!"

"*Hamdullillah!* What'll we do with it?"

"Earn it. And do *good* with it."

"Sure thing. *Allahu Akbar!* Yea, verily the face of Allah the M e r c i f u l, the Compassionate, is turned unto these, his servants; and Mohammed, his Prophet, hath spoken up for us like a lil' man. Small prophets and quick returns maketh the heart glad."

After which the two sat sunk in deep thought.

"We'll go riding this evening," said the Emir at length. "You can ride with Miss Vanbrugh, and I'll take Miss Atkinson. But let me have a turn with Miss Vanbrugh, too, on the way back. And if she starts joshing I'll own up and confess—that is, if it's plain she's called our bluff."

"What about the lil' Britisher?" asked the Vizier.

"*She* wouldn't butt in an' spoil things, especially after Miss Vanbrugh had a talk with her, but we've got to go careful, Bud. We don't want to get lead instead of gold out of Ole Man Bojolly. And, believe me, son, it's Miss Vanbrugh for his, if she'll fall for him."

"I'll cut his throat first," growled the Vizier.

"Cut nothing, son," replied the Emir. "You're always falling in and out of love. We aren't going to lose two hundred thousand bucks and the chance of setting these Injuns up for life, just because you haven't got any self-control. Old Man Boje has come here in his innocence, wanting to give us a fortune, and we aren't going to hinder him any.

"If Miss Vanbrugh'll have you, Bud, I'll be the happiest Sheikh of the Sahara, and I'll do all I know to bring it off. But if she won't have you, you've got to take your gruel—*and* your sack of gold dust!—that's all there is *to* it. Savez?"

"Huh! *You* aren't in love, you perishin' politician."

"No? Well, then, p'rhaps I'll have the clearer head to steer us past the doors of the Oran Gaol and through those of the Bank of France."

"AND you really are perfectly certain that you can bluff it through to the end, and that Major de Beaujolais won't place you?" said Miss Mary Vanbrugh, as she and the Emir el Hamel el Kebir rode side by side in the desert.

"Why not?" returned the Emir. "We've been bluffing Arabs, with our lives depending on it, and got away with it. It'll take more than a Frenchman to——"

"He's one of the cleverest men that ever lived," interrupted the girl.

"Sure thing," agreed the Emir easily. "But he isn't an Arab. Why should he suspect anything wrong when he sees the Bedouin taking us as Bedouin? It wouldn't enter his head. It isn't as though he was looking for European or American crooks, or ever dreamt there were any about. I may tell you there's another Frenchman here, too, who lived in the same barrack-room with us! He hasn't an idea we're not Arabs."

"How you *did* it, I don't know."

"Easy enough. Buddy and I were wandering in the Sahara for years with a couple of bright boys and with our eyes and ears open. We stayed dumb, but we learnt a lot.

"Then I got lost, and this tribe picked me up, with one foot in Heaven and the other twitching feeble but full of hope. I stayed dumb until I surely knew Arabic better than American. Got it from a three-year-old kid mostly. As he learnt to talk so did I. Then I did a miracle on myself and came undumb. Even then I never said a sentence nor a word that I hadn't heard and learnt by heart. It was easy as fallin' off a log.

"The poor Injuns thought I was from a strange tribe, if they thought anything at all, when my pronunciation was funny, or I hadn't got quite the right religious dope. But I wasn't far out, anyway, for I'd been studying that like a fanatic for years."

"Your life must have hung by a thread at times?"

"Well, it never hung by a palm-fibre rope, Miss Mary Vanbrugh, which is what it deserved." And the Emir smiled.

"And does still," replied the girl. "And where did you pick your friend up?"

"What, Buddy? Why, he and I have been friends since I was a road-kid. We've been soldiers, sailors, hoboes, cowboys, hoss-wranglers, miners, lumber-jacks, Wild West showmen, conjurers, Foreign Legendaries and Sheikhs. When I got lost in the desert he got away to safety. And what you think he did? Rustled some camels and a nigger and come back to look for me, right where he'd nearly died himself. And when I got sort of top-sergeant there I sent scouts all around that same country to see if they could get news of another poor Bedouin picked up there like I was.

"I never did, but I got news of a gang of Touareg who'd come up that way. They'd got him, and I got them, good and plenty and just in time."

"What sort of man is he? He has certainly got good taste, for he gives me the eye of warm approval. Virtuous?"

"No. He isn't what I'd call that. I allow he's broken all the commandments and looks to do it again. No, he hasn't got any virtues that I know of, except courage, and loyalty, and gratitude, and reliability.

"There isn't much to Buddy beyond

that he's braver than any lion, for a lion hasn't got imagination, and that he never did a mean thing in his life, nor went back on his word or his pal. No. He's only got a fine head and a great heart, and doesn't know the meaning of the words fear, despair, failure, selfishness, nor any kind of meanness. Just an ornery cuss."

"You want me to like him, I see," smiled the girl, "so you damn him with faint praise. He sounds very like a man to me."

"No, I'm praising him with faint damns like '*ornery cuss.*' You see, I'm one myself, and so Bud and I fit. As to your liking him, you couldn't help that, but it would be a dark day for me if you married him and took him home to mother."

"Don't worry, Mr. Emir! What would happen if you two fell in love with the same girl?" asked Mary Vanbrugh.

"Poor girl would be left a widow, like before she was married. I wouldn't butt in on Bud, and Bud wouldn't butt in on me."

"And how long do you plan to stay in on this Sheikh game?"

"Till the lil' kid's ready to come into the business and sit on his father's stool. I promised his old dad I'd see the boy through teething and high school. There's one or two sharks want his job."

"And will your friend stay here with you?"

"Sure, unless you take him away."

"Keep a stout and hopeful heart, Mr. Emir."

"Or unless Major De Beaujolais takes us both away in the middle of a camel corps of *goums* and things."

"Why should he want to do that?" asked the girl.

"He wouldn't *want* to, but it would be his painful duty, when it came out that we were swindlers and Americans, a big man and a little man, the same being wanted for departing from the Legion. They'd recognize us, too, as soon as they got our whiskers off. So if you get mad with us any time, and tell him, it's us for big trouble."

"It's the very last thing in the world I'd tell him, if you were my worst enemies. I'd give anything in the world for him to bring off this treaty successfully. If you only knew what it *means* to him! He has spent his life, and as hard a life as yours has been, in fitting himself for just such a stroke as this. It's not for himself, either; it's for France. It's his longing to feel that he has done something for her, and that his labor hasn't been wasted. His uncle is Commander-in-Chief and Governor-General, and he's almost God to Major de Beaujolais. I think he'd value a pat on the back from the old man more than the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor. How did you come to know the Major?" asked the girl suddenly.

"He was mule-walloping with a detachment of the Foreign Legion."

"And you served under him?"

"We did."

"How jolly, as they say in England."

"Yup. *Beau*-jolly, as they say in France."

"I do wonder he doesn't recognize you."

"Well, we were clean-shaven in those days. A doormat of whiskers and a *kafiyeh* make a lot of difference. He might yet, but people generally only see what they're looking for."

"It must be splendid to serve under him," said the girl.

"We hid our joy," replied the Emir. "We even tore ourselves away."

"And of course you'll make this treaty?"

"Sure. Why not? Provided there's no peaceful penetration of the blessings of civilization, I'll make it. France protects us, and we keep this

end o' the Sahara quiet and healthy. We get a rake-off from France, an' we waxeth rich and prosperous because the caravan roads and trade routes'll be kept open and peaceful."

"You mean you and your friend will get rich?" asked Miss Vanbrugh.

"I surely hope we make our modest pile. We aren't in the Sheikh business solely for our health. But what I meant was that these Injuns should prosper and get a bit in the bank. I'd like to hand over the whole outfit as a going concern when the young Sheikh's old enough. And I'd like to be one of the few white men who have left the native better than he found him. It's a plumb silly idea of mine."

"You want to 'make two blades of grass grow where one grew before'?"

"Well, not so much grass, as *loobiyeh*. It's better grazing."

THEY approached the outlying palms of their corner of the Oasis.

"It's a bargain, then, Mr. Parlor-Sheikh," said the girl. "You'll do your utmost to keep Major de Beaujolais thinking you two are real Arabs, and you'll make the Treaty with him and see that it is kept, and I'll do my best for you."

"Sure. I'd sooner face a sack of gold twenty-franc pieces than a firing squad any day. There's everything to gain for everybody on the one hand, and everything to lose for everybody on the other."

"There certainly is, including your beloved Arabs, remember. I shall be just a tiny bit anxious until we're away again, but, oh, I do enjoy seeing you two solemn boys playing Sheikhs!"

"*Bismillah arahman arahmin. En nahs teyibin hena,*" boomed the Emir el Hamel el Kebir as they neared the tents.

"Why, certainly," replied Miss Vanbrugh. "You've said it, Mr. Emir, whatever it is."

AT EVEN-TIDE the Sheikh el Habibka el Wazir was dining with his lord, the Emir el Hamel el Kebir, as usual.

In sonorous Arabic these grave men discussed matters of importance to the Tribal Confederacy until the servants had removed the tray of bowls and brought the earthen cups of black coffee and the long *narghilehs*.

As soon as they were alone, they ceased to express their thoughts in the ancient tongue of the followers of the Prophet.

The Emir, smiling bravely, nodded his head.

"I was right, son," he said. "I could not look that young woman in the face and get away with it."

"You talked *American* to her!"

"Harvard-pure."

"*Jiminy!*" breathed the Vizier. "The *lil'* devil!"

"Why?" inquired the Emir.

"Because she wouldn't talk a word of American when *I* rode alone with her! She only knew French. She surely did get my goat! When I tried a bit of broken English on her, as a sort of thin end of the wedge to letting her know we also were hundred per cent. Anglo-Saxon Americans from God's Own Country, she says:

"'*Commong-vous porty-vous*' an' '*Doo-de-la-day.*' I mostly forgot my French since I left the Legion, so I said: '*You spik Engleesh. Las' night you spik 'im,* an' she replies, '*Nong Mossoo. Vous etiez ivre.*' (That means drunk.) '*Vous parlez Arabique,*' and every time I tried to say something kind and loving in English she says:

"'*Parlez Arabique, Mossoo le Sheikh. Je no comprong pas Anglais.*' An' she don't know a word of Arabic, I swear."

"How d'you know she doesn't?"

"Well, she'd have fallen off her horse if she had understood what I

said. And there I was, tryin' to talk plain American and her askin' me in French to talk Arabic. An' I didn't get anywhere a-tall."

"Well, son, my experience was more joyful than yours," the Emir conceded. "Yea, verily, O Son of Delight and Charmer of Many!"

"How come?" asked the Vizier threateningly.

"We talked good, sound, solid business, in good, sound, plain American. So I've told Miss Mary Vanbrugh that we're two genuine low-brow Americans — honest-to-God fourflushers and fakers. She said she could see that for herself."

"She did, eh?"

"She did. And, of course, I had to admit that we're Americans and wanted by the police."

"You—*what?*"

"Wanted badly for tearing ourselves away from the Foreign Legion," the Emir continued imperturbably. "And I owned up that Old Man Beaujolais had us scared stiff, and that you and I allowed we'd either got to find Boje a long desert grave or get up and hike once more, or else give in and go quietly. Then Mary——"

"Who are you calling 'Mary' so familiarly?" the Vizier demanded instantly.

"Then Miss Vanbrugh put her cards on the table, too. A clean showdown. Boje isn't deserter-huntin'. He's got something better to do. And he hasn't a notion about Rastignac. That stuff he pulled on us about *'bearing a great and peaceful message' wasn't bunk at all!* What he said to us in the Great and Solemn Interview was the real thing."

"One million francs of real money —eh?"

"One hundred per cent. pure. We must have had uneasy consciences, son. He surely thinks he's on a mission for his home town. He hasn't told Miss Vanbrugh too much about it, he being a diplomat and all, but she knows that much. And what do you know about this? He's a big gun in their Secret Service, not just a major in the Mule-Wallopers."

"By the Beard of the Prophet and the Name of Allah, *I'll* wallop him," growled the Vizier.

"Well, as I was going to say when you injected that vulgar remark, Miss Vanbrugh and I have come to terms. She won't tell Beaujolais that we're genuine swindlers and deserters from the Legion, provided we treat old Boje kind and loving and fall in with all his schemes."

"We'll fall in with those two hundred thousand dollars without a kick or a moan," observed the Vizier, "and I rise to remark that Viziers are Treasurers in this undeveloped rural State."

"So we're on velvet again, Bud," the Emir resumed placidly. "All Old Man Beaujolais wants to do is to press the cash on us. All we've got to do is sign this treaty not to let the Senussi in on the ground floor, and to have no truck with low foreigners. That means all people that on earth do dwell, who aren't French. Shall we boot Rastignac out and tell him to go while the going's good, or keep him around and make a bit on the side? But it's old Boje's treaty we'll sign!"

"You can't sign 'Hank' in Arabic, can you?" inquired the Vizier.

"I certainly can, and you can sign *'Bud,'* too. You're only to do a lot of pot-hooks upside-down, with their tails turning left, and then we scribble on it. I've seen Abdul Salam doing it. Besides, I've got the old Sheikh's family ring," and he indicated a great ancient seal ring that he wore on a slightly withered finger —of which the top joint was missing —the only finger that the ring would fit.

"Well, as I was trying to say, Buddy Bashaw, Miss Mary is as set on Beaujolais getting away with it as we are."

"Why? What's the graft?" inquired the Vizier.

"Well, as I figure it, he's the golden-haired, blue-eyed boy. Saved her life in Zaguig. Shot up some rebels who were rebelling to kill, and then brought her safe out of Zaguig, where her own brother must have gone under by now, she says. The whole garrison was shot up, and him with 'em."

"Old Man Boje must have been mighty set on paying a call here, if he lit out from Zaguig while they were fighting."

"Exactly. You spoke the truth for once. Mary—I mean Miss Vanbrugh—says it's *the* big thing of his life, and if he pulls it off he's a made man. He wouldn't stop in Zaguig for anything, though his comrades and lifelong chum were in the soup."

"Then we raise our price," the Vizier suggested brilliantly. What's a measly million francs if it's as important as all that? Let's keep him guessing, and get some more in the jack-pot. Tell him we got other offers, too."

"Well, Son of Temptation and Father of Joyful Ideas, we won't hurry any. I certainly like having the girls around. I could have wept bitter salt tears of joy when those two girls stepped into our little home."

"Me, too, Hank! I went all wambly in my innards and got a lump in my throat. I nearly hugged 'em to my bosom. I *may* yet."

"Not b o t h , ' ' remonstrated the Emir. "In the Name of the Prophet let the Reins of Moderation restrain the Stallion of Forwardness."

"Only in the way of showing respect, I meant. I'm not a Mormon, am I? If Miss Mary'll marry me——"

"Well, don't go indulging your mind too much, Bud. It'll only make it worse for you later. The way Miss Mary talked I reckon she's a spinster for life or Mrs. Beaujolais for a like period, if he has the sense to ask her. She wouldn't do us any *harm*, but it's Old Man Beaujolais's good *she's* thinking of."

THE Vizier rose to his feet and strode up and down the tent like a caged lion.

"Look here, Hank," he said at last. "Can't we fix it for Mister Blasted Bojolly to take his punk treaty and *go*, leaving the girls behind?"

The Emir pondered the suggestion.

"We could put it up to him, Bud," he said at length, "but I don't think you get old Beaujolais right. I could live the rest of my young life without him, I allow, but I believe he's a hundred per cent. White Man. We haven't had a sporting bet for some time, Bud, and I'll lay you seven to three in *mejidies* that Beaujolais won't stand for it. He isn't goin' to leave two white girls in the wigwams of a camp of Indians while he gets away with the plunder. No, sir. I'll make it ten to one on the Major and——"

"Done! *Shake!*" s n a p p e d the Vizier, extending his hand, and the two shook. "I should certainly enjoy marrying his girl on his million francs. Teach him not to come here frightening people. And don't forget he left Dufour and Achmet and the others to die while he made his getaway.

"But we won't hurry things, son," he added. "Let Boje get a bit anxious first. We might pretend we were double-crossing him with the Rastignac outfit."

"You can have it your own way,

and run it how you like," agreed the Emir, "but I promised Miss Vanbrugh we'd not hurt a hair of his lovely hide, bless him."

"He's a brave man and he's straight. But I say he'd leave the girls in the lurch to get that treaty," persisted the Vizier.

A silence fell.

The Vizier, his head on his hand-clasped knees, made the cooing sounds that showed his friend he was indeed again in love.

"Hank, old hoss," he said, "she is the plumb loveliest girl from Egypt to Frisco an' from Hell to breakfast. *Yes*, sir!"

"Mary or Maudie?" murmured the Emir from the depths of his own long thoughts.

CHAPTER XXVIII

L'HOMME PROPOSE

ONCE again the Emir el Hamel el Kebir and his guest, Miss Mary Vanbrugh, rode alone.

"And why do you consult *me*, Mr. Emir?" said the girl. "Unlike yourself, I'm no matchmaker."

"If you're alluding to poor Buddy, I only spoke up for him because you were breaking his heart. And why I wanted to consult you about Miss Maudie Atkinson is because she's your hired help, and I don't want to take her away from you while you're in the desert. Also, I'd like to know if you think you could persuade Major De Beaujolais that it is all right to leave her behind with us. In fact, what do you think about it?"

"Well, I think that love is the only thing that matters," replied the girl, flushing adorably. "No, I'm *certain* it is. And if Maudie really loved you and you really loved Maudie, I'd say, 'Go to it, and God bless you,' for you couldn't do a wiser thing!"

"It's Maudie I'm thinking about more," said the Emir.

"So'm I. And I believe she'd be as happy as the day is long, for she's the most romantic soul that ever lived, and one of the staunchest. I know you'd be kind and good to her, and I know you'd have a splendid wife. She's real pure gold all through. And she'd worship the ground you trod on, for she's madly in love with love."

The girl gazed wistfully at the horizon.

"But remember," she continued, "she's very simple, and she's no 'Janey that's Brainy.' She won't brighten your wigwam with high-brow thoughts and bee-yu-ti-ful aspirations to make you lead a higher and a better life of culture and uplift."

"That's fine," agreed the Emir.

"And how long did you plan to deceive her and play this Sheikh game with her?" asked the girl.

"Just up to the day when she realizes that she's fair fed full with Arabs and desert Sheikhs, and begins to wish I was a common White Man. As soon as I see it in her eye that she misses the shops an' movies an' street cars an' candy an' the piano-and-canary-home - sweet - home stuff, she becomes Mrs. Hank of the U. S. A."

"That's sense. She'll want another woman to talk frocks and scandal with some day, however much she might love you."

"Sure. You think it's fair to her if I——?"

"Yes. If she loves you. She's seen how you live; and it's been the one great yarn of her young life to behold the desert Sheikh sheikhing in the desert. Shall I say anything to her?"

"Not on your life. I'm going to do the thing as I believe she dreams it. All women are cave-women at heart, and would like to be swept off their

feet once in their lives. It's when they've got to wash the cave-man's shirt, and he bawls her out when he can't find his slippers, that cave life wears thin. But they do certainly like to be swept off their feet and swept right away by a strong, silent he-cave-man once in their lives."

Miss Mary Vanbrugh sighed.

"Well, I hope you'll both be very, very happy, and if Maudie can stand desert life, you *will* be, for you're made for each other."

"And what about Major De Beaujolais?"

"What do you mean?"

"Will he agree to leave her behind?"

"Yes, if I can persuade him that she'll be happy here. To these European aristocrats she's just a servant and her tastes unaccountable. Besides, if Maudie *won't* go back, he can't take her by force."

"Would he leave her if he thought she'd get a bad time? Would he leave the pair of you, say, in return for my signing the treaty?"

"I don't think you quite understand a gentleman, if you talk like that," answered the girl.

"No? I haven't had much truck with gentlemen, Miss Mary Vanbrugh. Besides, to tell you the truth, I was thinking of Dufour and the others that he left to die for the sake of his treaty! I knew old Dufour. He was a man. He was sergeant-major with Major De Beaujolais when he was mule-walloping at Tokotu. I knew Achmet, too. He was a real fine he-man and *some* scrapper."

"Yes, yes," broke in the girl, "but it was *duty*. Duty is his God."

"Sure. It's what I'm saying. Isn't this treaty still his duty? It'll be real interestin'. All a matter of what's your own private 'beau ideal,' as they call it. Besides, Major De Beaujolais is French, and, as you said, he'd give his soul to get that treaty for his beloved France."

"His *soul*, perhaps, not his honor," was the proud reply, but the Emir, closely watching, had seen her wince.

"I always mistrusted people that go about with a wad of honor bulging out of their breast pockets. I've found——"

But Miss Mary Vanbrugh spurred her horse forward and the Emir's further words of wisdom were lost.

MISS Maudie Atkinson, bred and born in Cockaigne and the sound of Bow Bells, stood at eventide on a sandhill of the Oasis and gazed yearningly toward the setting sun.

She was a happy, happy girl, but the cup of her happiness was not full. She had, she felt, been, in a manner of speaking, captured by Sheikhs, but not by *a* Sheikh.

True, the great and beautiful man, the *lovely* man, in whose presence she had thrice feasted, had looked upon her with the eye that is glad, and Miss Atkinson, as an extremely attractive girl, who had grown up in London, was experienced in the Glad Eye.

She had had it, she was prepared to swear, from the Great Sheikh, and, moreover, he had held and squeezed and stroked her hand.

But, as one who knew Hampstead Heath on the Mondays that are holy, Bank Holy Days, at Easter, at Whitsun, and eke in August, Miss Atkinson knew a sense of something lacking.

Young men of London and of oncoming disposition had to be slapped and told to give over, to chuck it, and had to be asked what they thought they were a-doing.

There seemed to be no hope that the Great Sheikh was going to earn a slap and an admonition to chuck it.

Not his to chase, with flying feet, a shrieking damsel who fled across the

daisy-pied sward to a quiet spot. Not his to hug, wrestle, and mildly punch, a coy nymph, who scolded laughingly.

Not his to change hats and issue invitations to the swing-boats, roundabouts and cocoanut-shies.

No, a calm and dignified man, alas, but oh, so big and beautiful, and so authentic. And his eyes fair burnt into you. Just as the lady had written in the book, the lovely book of Sheikhs.

Maudie dreamed and remembered passages from the book:

> With a thunderous rush of heavy hoofs, the Desert Sheikh was upon her, and ere she could do so much as scream, she found herself swung like a feather to his saddle-bow and whirled afar across the desert. On, on, into the setting sun, while his hot lips found hers and drank deep of her beauty the while they burnt her very flesh like fire.

Ah-h-h-h-h-h! That was the stuff.

And even as the cupid's bow of Maudie's mouth trembled with the words, there *was* a thunderous rush of heavy hoofs, two huge and powerful hands took her beneath the arms, and she was mightily hauled from the ground and dumped heavily onto a hard saddle — (*Oo*-er!) — and whirled afar across the desert, on, on, into the setting sun.

Maudie all but swooned. Half fainting with joy, and with the hope fulfilled that maketh the heart too full for speech, she summoned the strength to raise her arms and her eyes.

The latter gazed straight into those of the Great Sheikh himself, and the former settled firmly about his neck.

His lips found hers in deed and very truth, and with a shuddering sigh of the deepest content and the highest gratitude for the fruition of a life's ambition, Maudie gave the Great Sheikh himself the first kiss of love—a long, long, clinging kiss—and was grateful to God for His wondrous goodness.

WHEN Maudie came to earth again, wondering to find the earth still there and Maudie still in the strong arms of this Wonder of the World, she wiped her eyes and nose with the sleeve of her *barracan,* sniffed, and gave a little sob.

The Emir reined in his horse, dismounted, and lifted her to the ground. Her knees betrayed her, and she sat down with some suddenness on the soft firm sand.

The Emir seated himself beside her and took her hand.

"Little girl," he said, "will you marry me?" and Maudie cast herself wildly upon his broad bosom.

"Oh, Sheikh, darling!" she said, and again flung her arms about his neck.

"We'll get married by the mullah here," said the Emir later. "Then, by'n by we'll go to where there's a Christian marriage man, an' get married some more. Have another wedding, Maudie!"

Maudie snuggled.

Anon, however, she dragged herself from him and stared wide-eyed.

"Why, you spoke *English!*"

"Certainly. I learned it since you came, so that I could talk to you," said the Emir modestly, and again gathered the girl in a huge embrace. "But mind you, Maudie," he said impressively, when they rose to go, "that Major de Beaujolais mustn't know I've learned English, or else he'd want to talk English all the time, and get me muddled in business perhaps, while I'm a beginner, or p'raps he'd think I wasn't a Sheikh at all!"

"Oh, *him!*" murmured Maudie languidly. "He's only a Frenchie."

In the *hareem* portion of the chief guest tent were four women, two white and two black.

The black women were slaves,

brought as 'orphans' from Lake Tchad by a Senussi caravan and sold to the old Sheikh twenty years before.

The bad old days of the fire-and-slaughter Arab slave-raider are gone forever, but there is a good deal of slave-dealing carried on, chiefly of children.

These are sold by their parents, or adoptive parents in the case of genuine orphans, to caravan leaders, who sell them again at a profit in the distant oases, where negroes, other than slaves, are not.

THE shocked European authority confiscates the entire caravan if a slave is found with it, but the caravan does not seek the spots honored by authority.

And if authority goes out of its way and seeks the caravan, it finds none but happy adopted children, staring big-eyed from the backs of camels, or toddling along beside kindly men, or seated patting scarcely "fair" round bellies, beside the cooking pot.

The unshocked Arab authority buys the healthy little animal and treats it well, because it is valuable property; and, when it grows up, puts it in regiment or *hareem*, according to its sex, where it may rise to high rank and power as a military commander, or to the position of Sheikh's favorite and mother of future Sheikhs.

Slave-raiding is the foulest and vilest pursuit ever engaged in by man, but a great deal of nonsense has been talked about slavery as an institution.

And certainly the two black slave-women, who squatted in the *hareem side* of the guest tent, were happy enough, as they produced beautiful Arab stuffs and clothing, *henna* for the nails and hands, *hadida* for the hair, *khalouk* rouge, *koh'eul* for the eyes, and other matters of feminine interest from the big *bahut* trunk they had carried over from the tents of Sidi Dawad Fetata.

The four women chattered: the chirping sounds of a Senegalese dialect mingled with the cockney accent of London and the refined tones of a Boston high school and college; and though in language they were divided, in interest they were one, as the slave girls showed the uses of the stuffs, clothing, unguents, paints and powders that they had brought.

Anon came the aged Sidi Dawad Fetata, smiling sweetly and saying that his long white beard was a perfect chaperone and his age-dimmed eyes were blinded by the beauty of the Sitts.

"*Salamoune aleikoume Esseleme, Sitt Roumya,*" he said, "*marhaba marhaba,*" and proceeded to hope that life might be as sweet as *Mekhtoume*, the Wine of Paradise; as beautiful as *Jahwiyan* daisies in the desert; as satisfying as the dates of Nabt al Saif; and as long and flowing as the Tail of the Horse of the Prophet.

"The old dear is making a beautiful speech, Maudie, if we could only understand a word of it," said Mary Vanbrugh, and smiled graciously upon the visitor, who promptly produced gifts; a silver Hand of Fatma charm, and silver box to hold *koh-eul* for Mary; with a tiara of small coins and a *feisha* charm (to keep a husband's affections) for Maudie.

The old gentleman then announced a *diffa*, clapped his hands, and the slave girls brought in a huge *sahfa* dish, on which was an appalling heterogeny of bowls and platters, of *berbouks*, pellets of sweetened rice; *cous-cous*, *cherchem* beans; *leben* curds, *burghal* mince-meat and porridge, *asida* dough and onions; *fatta* carrots and eggs, strange sweetmeats, fruits and drinks.

"As good a death as any, grandpa,"

replied Miss Vanbrugh to the old Sidi's *"Bilhana!* With joy! *Bil-skifa!* With health!" and fell to.

"COMING round, Maudie?" asked Miss Vanbrugh later, when they were alone, comatose, replete, bursting with food.

"I'm *getting* round, Miss," replied Maudie. "We'll be as round as one of those lovely fat Arab babies dressed in a string of beads, if we go on like this, Miss," she added. "I'll fair lose my figger."

"We'll offer a reward for it, Maudie. Lost: a lovely figure. Anyone returning the same to Miss Maudie Atkinson at No. 1 High Street, Emir's Camp, Great Oasis. . ."

"Oh, Miss," murmured Maudie, "may I tell you something? I'm not going to be Miss Atkinson much longer."

"You've told me already, Maudie."

"Oh, *no,* Miss!"

"But you have! You've been mad, Maudie, ever since it happened. Perfectly insane, going about like a dying duck in a thunderstorm; trying to do my hair with a tooth-brush; trying to manicure my nails with sandpaper. You don't know who you are nor where you are; whether you're on your head or your heels. Now tell me all about it."

Maudie told.

"IF you see Major de Beaujolais, to speak to, don't tell him that some of the Arab Sheikhs know English, Maudie," said Miss Vanbrugh when Maudie's rapture-recital was finished.

"No, Miss," replied Maudie. "The Great Sheikh told me not to. He said the Major might take advantage of his innocence and make him talk English when he was bargaining, and do him down. It would be a shame to impose on him, wouldn't it, Miss?"

"I don't think the Major will impose on the Emir, Maudie," said Miss Vanbrugh a little coldly perhaps. "Anyhow, say nothing about it."

"I'd sooner rather die first, Miss," asseverated Maudie warmly.

"Well, if you do let it slip, you'll die after," observed Miss Vanbrugh, "for I'll certainly kill you, Maudie."

DURING the days that followed, the Emir noticed a change in the temper of his trusty Vizier.

Perhaps no one else would have seen it, but to the Emir, who loved his friend with a love passing the love of women, including Maudie, it was clear that the Vizier was really suffering and unhappy.

Never, nowadays, in the privacy of the open desert did he sing—

O ki yi yip; O ki yi yi,
O ki yi yip; and ki yi yi,
Get along, you stinkin' camels, don't you cry,
We'll all be in Wyoming in the sweet by-an'-by—

or any other amended version of any of the eighty verses of "The *Old Chisholm Trail.*" Nor did he utter vain longings for his old mouth-organ.

His hard gray eyes, that saw so much and told so little, enigmatic, ironic, unreadable, humorous, were humorous no longer.

The Emir was troubled, torn between two emotions, and quite unreasonably ashamed.

The object of his thoughts rode past on a lathered horse, staring grimly before him, looking neither unto the right hand nor unto the left. He looked dangerous.

"Oh! Sidi Wazir!" called the Emir. "Come and *faddhl,*" and El R'Orab the Crow ran and took the Vizier's horse and led it away to its stable of plaited palm-leaves in the *fondouk* horse-lines.

"Good job this is a dry state, Hank," growled the Vizier, seating

himself beside the Emir, "or I should cert'nly lap the *laghbi* this night. *Hamdulillah!* I'd sure be off the water-wagon this evening."

"What's the trouble?" asked the Emir, although he knew too well.

"Trouble is, I'm going to bust that Sheikh-wrangler, Bojolly *Rahmat Allah!* Treaty or no treaty. And tell him some talk in the only sensible language there is."

"What's he done now?" inquired the Emir.

"Put me in Dutch with Miss Vanbrugh. The Infiddle dog."

"I thought he'd always play a square game, Bud."

"I mean it was through him I spoke rudely to a lady an' showed myself the low-life ornery bindle-stiff I am."

"You were never rude to any lady, Bud."

"Yes, I was, Hank. I asked her if she was engaged to be married to a French officer."

"What did you do that for?"

"She turned down my respectful proposal of matrimony."

"And then you fired up about Beaujolais?"

"Sure."

"And what did Miss Vanbrugh say when you did that? She talked American at you all right this time, then?"

"Yep. You bet. When I began to call Beaujolais down . . . she says, *'It's a beautiful sunset tonight,* Mr. Man', and she thought she was ridin' with a decent and courteous American and that Major De Beaujolais was the finest and noblest and bravest man she'd ever met, an' thank you, she'd prefer to ride back to the Oasis alone."

"What did you do then."

"I says, 'I thought you was American, Miss Vanbrugh,' an' then I overrode my hoss like the mean coyote I am."

"So you're sore and ashamed. You hurt a horse and a woman, the two best things there are."

"And I'm goin' to eat sand, and I'm goin' to bust that Sheikh-wrangler, Beaujolais."

"How?"

"He can shout his own fancy, knives, guns, rifles if he likes. P'raps he'd prefer to use that sword he's brought all this way to impress us and the girls. I'll back my Arab sword against it, if he likes."

"What'd *you* like."

"Knives. I haven't had a knife-fight since when. And it's a satisfyin' way of expressin' your feelings to a man you don't much like."

"And Miss Vanbrugh, Miss Vanbrugh who you love so much, and who thinks Major Beaujolais the finest an' noblest an' bravest man she ever saw? Didn't I tell you, right back at the very first? Didn't I say to you, *'Don't you go kidding yourself, Bud, for she's going to be a spinster or Mrs. Beaujolais.*"

THE Vizier scowled.

"Now I'll tell you something for your good, Buddy Bashaw," The Emir resumed. "You aren't in love with anybody. You're just plumb jealous of a better man than yourself, because he's got away with it. Who was first in the field? You talk about busting Beaujolais. And why? Because you can't get his girl away from him!"

"You're a great help," growled the Vizier.

"Certainly! If you haven't got the innocence of the dove, nor the wisdom of the sarpint, you *can* have the sense of a jack-rabbit. Old Man Beaujolais brought Miss Vanbrugh here, and he's goin' to take her away again. You made your firm offer of marriage

and it was declined with thanks. Now behave yourself, and be ashamed in peace."

"Sure! But if I'm plumb jealous of a better man than I am, there's no objection to makin' certain who's the better man, is there?"

"There is. You aren't going to fight Major Beaujolais, so don't think it. *Wallahi!*"

"Why not fight him?"

"Because he's our guest; because he's going to give us a lot of money; because we don't want a French army here looking for him; because Miss Vanbrugh thinks he's the noblest, bravest and . . . "

"All right. That'll be enough," interrupted the Vizier. "Because we're going to try this brave man out just the same. We're goin' to find out how much this French parlor-snake and lounge-lizard does love Miss Vanburgh. First of all I'm goin' to take ten *Mejidies* off you, an' if I don't, then you're goin' to take a hundred off *me*."

"How's that?"

"You forgot that lil' bet we made? We're goin' to knock him up in the dead o' night an' offer him the treaty, signed, sealed and witnessed, provided he saddles up an' lights out tomorrow *without* the girls."

"Which he cert'nly won't."

"An' if you're right you get your ten. *And* soon after that, we'll give him a real test. Now, I'd lay down my life for Miss Vanbrugh or any other nice girl."

"Sure thing. *Any* girl."

"And if Boje *really* loves Miss Vanbrugh, let him lay down his. We'll give him the opportunity. He ought to be proud of the chance to do it! He won't, though, and I put a hundred to one on it."

"Done!" and the two erring men shook hands upon it.

"It's robbing you, Bud, and I shouldn't do it," pondered the Emir thereafter, "but you've got to live and learn."

"You live until tonight and you'll learn you've lost ten bucks," was the cold reply.

"I'll live, if Rastignac don't get me," answered the Emir. "He'd poison our coffee when we visited him or shoot us unarmed as soon as he'd look at us, if he thought he could get away with it, and nominate his own Emir here. Why I didn't shoot him when he suggested murderin' Beaujolais and doing worse for his two female spies, I do *not* know."

"Me neither," agreed the Vizier. "I promise myself a quiet heart-to-heart wrangle with Rastignac when the time comes. Think we should be layin' up trouble for the tribes if Rastignac was never seen again?"

"Sooner or later. It's bound to come, though, when we sign up with the French, as we must. The foul, filthy coyote! I'd like to hang him on a tree."

"He's got the face of a shark and the heart of a shark," observed the Vizier.

"No, no! That's an exaggeration," reproved the Emir. "There never was a shark with a face as much like a shark's as Rastignac's is. Nor with a heart as much like a shark's, neither. Still he's a brave man, and he shall die a man's death if we don't let him go."

"Right, Hank," agreed the Vizier. "Let me fight him. *Knives!*"

"We'll see how things work out with Beaujolais before we settle with Rastignac," replied the Emir. "I'd like to stick 'em in a ring with any weapons they'd like to say, after tellin' Beaujolais that Rastignac offered us big money to do for him and the girls."

The Vizier growled, but nodded. There was no doubt about the suggestion having possibilities.

CHAPTER XXIX

LA FEMME DISPOSE.

YOLUBA, the seven-foot Sudanese slave, on sentry-go outside the guest-tent, heard the murmur of voices rising and falling within.

This did not interest him in the least.

Nothing interested him greatly, save to get the maximum of food, love, fighting and sleep, and the approbation of his lord the Sidi el Hamel el Kebir, Commander of the Faithful and Shadow of Heaven.

To do this, orders must be obeyed promptly and exactly. Present orders were to prevent the Franzawi Sidi from leaving the guest-tent, firmly but respectfully to tell him he must stay within, because the sun (or moon) was very hot without.

Suddenly the voices ceased, and then the Franzawi's rose to an angry and abusive shout. Should he rush in?

No; for the Emir and the Vizier were coming out.

"I hand it to you, Hank," admitted the Vizier, as the two entered the pavilion of the Emir. "Beaujolais cert'nly spoke up like a man. He's made good *so far*."

"You can hand me ten chips, too," observed the Emir. "And if you go on with it, you'll hand me a hundred. I'll let you back out if you want to quit. In fact, I'd like you to. I hate playing a low-down trick on a brave man."

"Cut out the sob-stuff, Hank," was the prompt reply. "If he's the blue-eyed hero, let him live up to it, or *die* up to it. He won't know it's a trick, either. Besides, if you're so all-fired anxious about Miss Vanbrugh; let's see if he's solid, before you give him your blessing and a wedding present."

"What's the frame-up?" asked the Emir.

"Why, we're going to be the fierce and changeable treacherous Sheikhs on him for a bit, and get him buffaloed. Then we'll pay him another midnight call an' tell him he's hurt our tenderest feelings, callin' us dogs an' pigs an' such. Got to be wiped out in blood. But we don't want to wipe out a guest ourselves, so if he likes to do it himself, we'll let the girls go free and uninjured, immediately."

"And if he won't?"

"Then we say, 'Very well, Mr. Roumi. The girls come into our *hareems*, the treaty gets signed, an' you can get out and take it with you.' "

"And if he says, 'How can I trust you to give me a square deal when I'm dead?' "

"Then we say, 'You've got to trust us. No option. But when we noble savages give our word on the O'Ran—it goes.' "

"And how do we work it?" The Emir inquired mildly.

"Nasty sticky death. Poison."

"But he might drink it, feeling sure it was a bluff and grinning to himself while hopin' for the best."

"He's going to know it's poison, all right," the Vizier declared. "Good forty-mile, mule-slaying weed-killer. Some of the stuff we took off old Abdul Salam. He's going to see it kill a dog."

"Well, it'll kill *him*, then, won't it?"

"Nope. The poison'll be in the poor dog's drinkin'-water *already*. Then I'll pour half a gill of pure milk into it, an' the lil' dog drinks and hands in his checks. Then I give the rest of the milk to Boje in his coffee. Then it's up to him. If he drinks, you get a hundred bucks, and old man Beaujolais gets Miss Vanbrugh."

"And if he doesn't?"

"We'll ride him out of town and tell Miss Vanbrugh that the lil' hero,

who was goin' to live for her, didn't see his way to *die* for her."

"You can tell her, Bud. I'll be somewhere else at the moment . . . "

"Well, we're not goin' to put him in any danger, nor do a thing to him, are we?"

"Not a thing. And you're going to a girl to bear the glad news that her hero's slunk off and left her because his hide was in danger and to get his treaty signed."

"But it'll be *true*, won't it?" expostulated the Vizier.

"Yes, and that's why she'll never forgive you," replied the Emir. "But it won't be," he added after a short pause. "Beaujolais will drink that fake poison of yours, and he'll come out of this mess better than we will. I don't like it, Bud. But it'll come back on your own silly head. Mary'll love the Major all the more, and our name'll be Mud. The Major 'll love Mary all the more, because he tried to die for her."

"Die nothing!" jeered the Vizier. "Drinking poison at three o'clock in the morning's a tougher proposition than shootin' off guns in a scrap. Besides, s'pose he did play the lil' hero an' drink the fatal draught to save his loved one's life, he won't tell her about it afterward, will he, 'specially when he finds it was all a fake?"

"No. He won't say anything, son. But I will. If Beaujolais drinks dog-slaying poison on an empty stomach in the nasty small hours o' the morning, he's goin' to get the credit for it, and I'll see that he does."

"Well, he won't, Hank. So don't spend those hundred bucks before you collect."

THE Emir sat stroking his beard reflectively, and murmured, *"Wallahi! Verily 'he worketh well who worketh with Allah,'* saith the Book. Bust me if I know. Anyway it'd settle that lil' girl's doubts once for all, an' poor Dufour's ghost won't worry her. If I guess her right, she hates one little corner of Beaujolais and worships the rest of him with all her soul. It's an awful low-down trick in a way, but it'll settle things once and for all for Miss Mary Vanbrugh.

"If the Major is a dyed-in-the-wool bachelor, with his work as his wife and his job as his mistress, she'd better know it, the sooner the quicker. It is a low-down game, Bud, but those Secret Service men cert'nly spend their lives in bluffing and playing tricks. It's their job. And they ought to take it in good part if they're bluffed themselves. Bluff! What a bluff to pull on the bluff-merchant. Well, let it rip."

"Sure," replied the departing Vizier. "G'night!"

AS the Emir and his Vizier rode back from visiting the camp of the emissary of the Sultan of Stamboul and his great Brother, watching the drill of the camel-corps recruits, inspecting the *fondouk* and lines, and generally doing the things that most Oriental Rulers leave to others to leave undone, the Emir asked his Vizier if he had slept well, and if he had risen in a better frame of mind.

"I'm goin' to try Beaujolais out, I tell you," replied the Vizier.

"And you've got it clear that whether he stands or falls, it won't do you any good with Miss Vanbrugh."

"Yup. I'm done with women. And I don't ask any girl twice. She refused me flat, quite nice but quite certain. And, when I called Beaujolais down, quite nasty an' still more certain . . . No, Hank, my heart may be broken, but I'm facing up to life like a man."

"Sure thing, Bud. Now drop this foolishness about the Major. It won't do any good."

"Do some good if it saves Miss Van-

brugh from a fortune-huntin' French foreigner, won't it? American girls should marry American men."

"And American men should marry American girls, I suppose," observed the Emir.

"You said it. Say, isn't that lil' Maudie girl some peach?"

"She surely is. Pity your heart's broken, Bud. Still—American men have got to marry American girls, anyway."

"Well, Anglo-Saxon men ought to marry Anglo-Saxon girls, I mean. No frills an' doo-dahs about Maudie, even if she is British. Make a fine plain wife for a plain man."

"You certainly *are* a plain man, Bud," admitted the Emir reluctantly. "But Maudie may be engaged already."

"She doesn't wear any ring. I looked to see,"

"Well, I have known engaged girls not wear a ring."

"Then they were engaged to mean skunks," decided the Vizier, and burst into some song. His broken heart evidently was mending, and cool dawn in the desert is a very stimulating, lovely hour.

The Emir smiled tolerantly as he listened to one more variation of "The Old Chisholm Trail." All was well with Buddy, when Buddy sang.

"Wish I had my old mouth-organ," observed the Vizier.

"Your mouth is an organ in itself," suggested the Emir, as the Vizier again lifted up his voice and informed the wide Sahara that:

Old Hank Sheikh was a fine ole boss,
Rode off with a gal on a fat-backed hoss,
Old Hank Sheikh was fond of his liquor,
Allus had a bottle in the pocket of his slicker.

"How you know I rode off with a girl on a fat-backed horse?" asked the Emir as the Vizier paused for breath.

"I didn't," admitted the Vizier. "Did you? Sort of thing you *would* do. Many a true word spoken in jest."

"Sure," agreed the Emir placidly.

They rode on.

"Sing some more," requested the Emir after a while. "Thy voice delights me, O Father of a Thousand Nightingales. It's good training for these highly-strung Arab horses. Makes the animals calm, in a mere battle."

And the Vizier continued the Saga, in the vein of the history-recording troubadour of old:

Foot in the stirrup and hand on the horn,
Worst old Sheikh that ever was born,
Foot in the stirrup, then his seat to the sky,
Worst old Sheikh that ever rode by.

BESIDE a little irrigation runlet Miss Maudie Atkinson sat and waited, her mental attitude somewhat that with which she had been familiar all her life at the hour of one, on the Sabbath day.

Emerging from the guest-tent, at what, after much peeping, she considered to be a propitious moment, she had strolled past the tent of her *fiancé* the Great Sheikh, and walked slowly toward a strategic spot.

Here she threw off her *barracan* and stood revealed, Maudie Atkinson, in a nice cotton frock, silk stockings and white shoes. Much more attractive to Arab eyes, she was sure, than shapeless swaddlings of a lot of blooming night-dresses and baggy trousers. Silly clothes for a girl with a figger.

Would he come?

Sure to, if he wasn't too busy, or hadn't got to take Miss Mary for a ride. When would that nice Major come up to the scratch and take what was waiting for him? Oh, what happy, lucky girls she and Miss Mary were!

Would he come?

A shadow moved beside her and she turned.

Golly! It was the little one. Didn't he look a nib in those gay robes!

"Good evening, sir," said Maudie.

"Evenin', Miss," replied the Vizier. "Shall we go for a lil' stroll under the trees?"

"I don't mind if we do, sir," said Maudie, rising promptly.

"I been admiring you ever since you came, Miss," observed the Vizier as they strolled off.

"No! Straight? Have you really?" ejaculated Maudie.

"Sure. All the time," replied her companion with conviction. "In fact I followed you tonight to say so, and to ask you if you thought you an' me might get together an' talk it over."

"*I* don't mind, sir," said Maudie. "Fancy *you* speaking English, too."

"Yes, Miss—er—yes. You see, I sent for a handbook as soon as I saw you that night."

"No! Not *really?*"

"Sure! Fact! Would I tell you a *lie?* But you must never let Major Beaujolais know."

"Oh, no, sir. Miss Vanbrugh said she'd kill me if I did. As if I would! Besides, I never see him now. Why are you keeping him a prisoner?"

"Oh, we're just making sure he doesn't run off an' take you two ladies away from us."

"He don't take me! I'll watch it," asserted Miss Maudie Atkinson.

"My heart would cert'nly break if he did, Miss Maudie. Will you marry me?"

"Oh, sir! If you'd only spoken sooner!" Maudie looked down and blushed. "I'm engaged to the other Sheikh. We're going to be married twice and have two honeymoons. It's really very kind of you, sir, but things being as they are, I . . ."

Maudie looked up. But the Sheikh had gone.

BEING a man of noble forbearance and generosity, the Vizier made no allusion to the human frailties of his lord. The soul of determination, and slow to accept defeat, he remarked during the course of the evening *faddhl*:

"Say, Hank, how'd you like to be a *real* brother-in-law to a Sheikh?"

"Fine, Bud. Have you got a sister for me to marry?"

"No. And if I had, I'd be pertickler who she married, too. I meant a real Sheikh, and I was referring to me bein' his brother-in-law."

"You?"

"'Spose I was to marry Miss Leila Nahkla, then? I'd be brother-in-law to the young Sheikh, wouldn't I?"

"You would. And own brother to a damn fool."

"Jealous of me again, Hank?"

"You've got marryin' on the brain, or where your brain ought to be."

"Sure. I'm all of a doo-dah. I want to marry, an' wanta go home. I sit on end by the hour and sing 'The Old Chisholm Trail,' and then I keep on saying 'Idaho, Montana, Utah, Oregon, Nevada, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, California' till you'd think I was going nutty."

"No, I'd never *think* it," observed the Emir, regarding the face of his Vizier benignly. "How long have you had this consuming admiration for Leila?"

"I got up with it this very morning. And I think I'll go an' have a talk with old Daddy Pertater and see what he thinks about me and Leila gettin' engaged. As you made him guardian, I s'pose he gets the rake-off?"

The Emir said he did.

BUT when, after speaking with old Sidi Dawad Fetata of all other subjects on the earth, in the heavens above, and in the waters under the earth, the Vizier inquired, with meaning, as to the health and happiness of

the Sitt Leila Nahkla, he learned a strange thing.

"My heart is sore for her, Sidi," announced the old man. "She is possessed of *djinns*. She cannot sleep. Every night she rises from her cushions and goes forth to walk beneath the stars. Old Bint Fatma follows her, and she says the girl talks with spirits. Always, too, she stands near the tent of the Emir and calls the protection of the Prophet and the blessings of Allah upon him. No, she sleeps not, and neither does she eat."

"Marriage worketh wonders with women," suggested the Vizier.

"Ya, Sidi," agreed the old man. "But the poor Leila's pale bridegroom will be Death. She will not live to marry my grandson—and he will pine for her and die also. I am an old man, Sidi, but the grave will close upon her and upon him while I yet cumber the earth."

And what do you know about *that* for a merry old crêpe-hanger?" the Vizier asked himself as he strolled to his tent.

HADJI Abdul Salam, doctor and saint, entertained visitors that evening.

"Often they sleep in the big pavilion where they have sat and *faddhled* till nearly dawn," he said to the more important of his two guests. "More often they sleep each in his own tent. There is usually a Sudanese sentry on the beat between the guest-tent and those of the Emir and the Vizier."

"We can wait till your man is on duty," said Suleiman the Strong, called El Ma'ian, "or, if he be a Sudanese, we can kill him."

"There might be a noise, and, if you are caught, I do not think you will leave the camp alive a second time. He knows it was you who sent the Emir Mahommed Bishari bin Mustapha abd Rabu's assassin, too."

"There will be no noise," said Suleiman the Strong grimly.

"Nor must either the Emir or the Vizier make a sound in dying," warned the good Hadji. "They are lions possessed by devils, and each would spring to the help of the other."

"Yea. See to it, thou Abdullah-el-Jemmal, that thy man dies swiftly and in silence," growled Suleiman.

"Right through the heart, Sidi, or across the throat, a slash that all but takes the head off," smiled Abdullah, "according to how he lies in sleep."

"Bungle not, or the Hadji here will put a curse upon thee that shall cause the flesh to rot from thy bones."

"Oh, *yes!*" chirped the doctor. "Surely! Be not taken alive in thy bungling, sweet Abdullah. A quick death will be a lovely thing in comparison with what I will arrange for thee, shouldst thou spoil our plans."

"And if I do my part well, I have *medjidies*, camels, women, tents to my heart's desire, and be made a man of consequence in the Tribes?" said Abdullah the Camel-man.

"Yea! Verily! After the dawn that sees the death of the Emir and the Vizier, thou wilt never work again, Abdullah; never sweat, nor hunger, nor thirst again, good Abdullah."

"Dost thou swear it, Sidi Hadji, on the Q'ran?" asked the camel-driver.

"I swear on the Q'ran, and on my head and my life and by the Beard of the Prophet and the Sacred Names of Allah, that thou shalt never hunger nor thirst again, Abdullah, after thou hast slain the Vizier."

"Yea," added Suleiman the Strong, with a sinisterly humorous glance into the merry eyes of the Hadji. "I myself will see to it that thou shalt never hunger nor thirst again, gentle Abdullah," and he displayed gleaming teeth in a smile that quite won the camel-man's heart.

How delightful to bask in the smiles of the future rulers of the tribe, and to know that one was shortly to become a Person of Quality and a Man of Consequence!

"And now, return to this tent no more," said the Hadji in speeding his parting guests, "for it is dangerous to do so. At times they visit me, though not often at night, and I have a fancy that the accursed El R'Orab the Crow spies upon me, and also the aged Yakub. Let them beware and watch their food, I say.

"Go in peace and with the blessing of Allah, and remain hidden with the caravan-men in the *fondouk* of the lower *suq*. Gharibeel Zarruk will bring thee word."

CHAPTER XXX

AUTOCRATS AT THE BREAKFAST TABLE

"WELL, what you know about *that* for a fight?" asked the Emir of his Vizier as they broke fast, after the duel between Major de Beaujolais and the *agent provocateur* from the East.

"I'll admit it was the best sword fight I ever seen," replied the Vizier. "I never denied that Rastignac or Boje were *real men*."

"And if Beaujolais gets Miss Mary, she gets a husband to be proud of," said the Emir.

"Yep. As a he-man that can hold up his end of a dog-fight, he's all right. But I tell you, Hank, a woman wants a man that's something more than a bad man to fight. Suppose he loves fightin' better than he loves her, what then? And s'pose his real views of women is that they're just a dead-weight on the sword-arm or gun-hand, and a dead-weight on your hoss's back?"

The Vizier paused and pondered mournfully.

"Don't stop," requested the Emir. "You remind me of Abraham Lincoln. It's almost poetry, too. I can lend you a bit. Hark to this:

> White hands cling where your wool is thickest
> He rideth the fastest who rideth the quickest.

"Where'd you get that from?" asked the Vizier suspiciously.

"I had to say it at school. There's a lot more:

> Fallin' down to Gehenna or off of a throne,
> He falleth the hardest who falleth alone.

"Don't see why he should," commented the Vizier. "'Specially if he wasn't alone and fell on the other fellow," he added.

"You're right, Bud, as usual," admitted the Emir. My mistake."

"WHO was the poor creature Major de Beaujolais found it expedient to kill?" asked Mary Vanbrugh during the evening ride with the Emir el Hamel el Kebir. "He was a Frenchman, too, so why was he treated as an enemy?"

"He wasn't treated as an enemy by us, though he soon would have been," replied the Emir. "We received him politely, and we listened to all he had to say. Listened too long for our comfort."

"And was it interesting?" asked the girl.

"Some of it certainly was," replied the Emir. "He got to know that there was a French officer here, openly wearing his uniform and accompanied by two white women. He told me exactly what I ought to do with the three of them, and offered me quite a lot of money to do it."

"What was it?" asked the girl.

"I won't put it in plain words," was the reply. "But you just think

of the plumb horriblest thing that could happen to you, and then you double it and you'll hardly be at the beginning of it, Miss Mary Vanbrugh."

"Oh!" said the girl. "And was that why Major de Beaujolais fought him?"

"Partly, I guess, along with other reasons. It certainly didn't help the man's chances any, that the Major knew what was proposed for *you*."

"How did he get to know?" asked the girl.

"That's what I got to find out," was the reply, "if I have to pretend he won't get his treaty unless he tells me. He'd do anything to get that safely signed, sealed and delivered."

"Not *anything*," said the girl, staring ahead unseeingly.

"Well, *that* we may discover, perhaps, all in good time," was the doubting reply. "Life is very dear, and a life's ambition is sometimes even dearer."

CHAPTER XXXI

"Wallahi!"

AT DEAD of night, the Sheikh el Habibka el Wazir awoke with the feeling that there was something wrong.

For as long as he could remember, this invaluable gift had been his, perhaps because, for as long as he could remember, he had lived, off and on, in danger, and under such conditions that light sleeping and quick waking had been essential to continued existence.

Also the fact that, in the months before his birth, his mother had slept alone in a log cabin, with a gun leaning against her bed, and an ear subconsciously attuned to the sound of the approach of stealthy terrors—Indians, wolves, mountain "lions," bad men, and, worst of all bad men, her husband—may have had something to do with his possession of this animal instinct or sixth sense.

Someone had passed the tent with stealthy steps. The sentry had done that a hundred times, but this was different.

The Vizier passed straight from deep dreams to the door of his tent, his gun at the level of the stomach of anyone who might be seeking sorrow.

"*Min* da?" he growled as he peered out.

Nobody. He crept toward the Emir's pavilion. Nothing, *Yes*, a shadow beside the guest-tent sentry, a young recruit, one Gharibeel Zarrug.

There should be no shadow on a moonless night.

The shadow stooped and went into the tent by the entrance to the men's part of it.

Had it been the other entrance, the Vizier would have fired; for persons wearing black clothing, for the sake of invisibility, do not enter *anderuns* at midnight for any good purpose.

The Vizier circled the guest tent in the darker darkness of the palm-clumps, approached and lay down behind it. Ah! The good and pious Hadji Abdul Salam! *What* was that? Murder, eh? The low-down treacherous swine!

And Suleiman the Strong was back again, was he? And who might *he* be? Good old Boje! Spoken like a man. Wouldn't leave the girls, wouldn't he? He would, to save his life and get his treaty through.

The Vizier crept around to the front of the tent and the knees of Gharibeel Zarrug smote together, as a figure rose beside him, and the voice of the Sheikh el Habibka el Wazir gave him sarcastic greeting.

A few minutes later, the Vizier also gave the Hadji Abdul Salam sarcastic greeting, and said he would see him safely home to his tent. He would take no refusal of the offer of his company, in fact . . .

AS the Emir el Kebir emerged from his pavilion before dawn the next morning, and strode to where El R'Orab the Crow led his master's great stallion up and down, he was joined by the Vizier.

When the two were clear of the headquarters tents of the "capital" of the Oasis, the Vizier told the Emir of the events of the night.

"The worst of these holy *mullahs* and *hadjis* and things is that they *stay* holy in the sight of these poor ignorant Injuns, no matter what they do; and you can't get away from it," observed the Emir. "There'd be a riot and a rebellion if I took good old Abdul and hung him on a tree. I'd be real sorry to do it, too. I like the cute old cuss, always merry and bright."

"He's gettin' a whole heap too bright, Hank," opined the Vizier. "But as you say, there's no lynchin' Holy Sin-Busters in this State. They can cut their mothers' throats or even steal horses, and they're still Holy Men an' acceptable in the sight of Allah."

"We better have a talk with old Dawad Fetata," said the Emir. "He knows the etiquette of handling Holy Joes when they get too bloodthirsty. *Bismillah!* We mustn't make any false moves on the religious stuff."

"Sure," agreed the Vizier. "But ole Daddy Pertater won't stand for having Abdul plotting the death of the Emir. He'll know how to hand it to Abdul. We'll have a lil' *mejliss*, with Abdul absent by request. What are we going to do about this Suleiman person that's got it in for you?"

"Let him come when he feels like it," growled the Emir. "He'll get his, good an' plenty, this time. What did you do with poor old Abdul?"

"Frightened him white. I cert'nly did put the fear of God in Abdul. Did a magic on him. Produced things from him that he hadn't got. Told him to watch his eyes and teeth as they'd soon fall outa him; watch his arms an' legs as they'd soon wither; watch his food because it'd soon turn to sand in him; watch his secret *laghbi* because it'd boil in his belly; watch his women because each one had a dancin' partner, secret like his fermented palm-juice; an' watch all through the night because Death and the Devil was coming for him. He's watchin' all right! He surely is a sick man this mornin'."

"Poor old Abdul. I must go and hold his hand and cheer him up some," said the Emir, then added: "I'm glad the Major played a clean game. I told you he was a hundred per cent white."

"He was straight enough," admitted the Vizier grudgingly. "But I don't like him any. And we'll settle his hash some night soon. Then we'll *see*."

THEY saw.

Never had the Emir and his Vizier cowered and fled before armed men as they cowered and fled from the wrath of the angry woman who burst into their presence that night, at the loud choking cry of the man they had foully murdered.

She was a raging Death-angel, her tongue a flaming sword.

"My God, *you killed him!* You murdered him! Poisoned him like a sewer-rat. What *happened*, you ham-handed buffalo?" panted the Emir as the two fled from the guest-tent and went to earth in the pavilion of the latter chieftain.

"Search me!" replied the Vizier, obviously badly shaken.

The Emir seized his friend's arm and glared into his face.

"You didn't double-cross me and *poison* that man on purpose. Not poison him? You wouldn't be such a damned yellow dog."

"Don't be a fool," replied the Vizier. "I gave him camel's milk. Part of what we had at supper. *He's* double-crossed *us*. Yelped so as Miss Vanbrugh would hear him, an' then threw a fake fit."

"Don't be a mean hound. He saw that dog die, an' he drank what he thought killed the dog. And he choked like the dog did, and then collapsed. He went white an' cold an' limp. He's dead, I tell you. God! How'll I face Mary? Bud, if I thought you . . ."

"You make me tired, Hank. If he's dead, the milk killed him. 'Nuff to kill anybody, too. I near died myself first time I drunk camel's milk!" They sat silent for a minute. "Say, Hank," said the Vizier suddenly, "think she'd turn cruel and tell Beaujolais on his death-bed that we're a pair of fourflushers? Or tell him tomorrow, if he lives?"

"No, she'd die, sooner. She says the Major would blow his brains out, in rage an' disgust an' fear of ridicule, if it came out that the Mahdi he'd circumvented with his superior Secret Service Diplomacy had circumvented him, the pride of the whole French Intelligence Bureau, making him sign a treaty for a million francs! Imagine him living with folks saying he didn't know a Mahdi from an American highjacker!"

The Emir rose.

"I'm going back," he said. "If he's dead that girl'll go mad. She isn't screamin' any. She's got a gun, too. Hope she shoots me first. I take the blame, boy, for allowing such monkeying. I know you didn't mean any harm."

"I sure didn't. I only meant it for her good. No, I didn't! I'm a liar! I was jealous of a better man. He *is* a ebtter man, *was* I mean. And I'll put my gun in his dead hand and shoot myself. That oughta satisfy him," he concluded as the Emir crept out of the tent.

THE Emir returned beaming.

"You cert'nly brought it off, Buddy Bashaw, and serves you right! Beaujolais ought to ask you to be best man!"

"What happened!" asked the bewildered Vizier. "He threw that fit on purpose!"

"No, sir. He was so blamed sure that he *was* drinking poison that he felt all the effects of it. *He felt just* as he saw that dog feel. I knew an Injun once, an Arapaho or a Shoshone, I think he was, back on the Wind River Reservation at Fort Washakie, and the boys played a trick on him one dark night; stuck a fork in his heel and yelled 'Rattler!' And he up an' died o' snake-bite, *pronto*."

"Cut out the funny stuff," said the Vizier.

"Fact. Like old Doc. Winter, back in Colorado in the old days. He sent out two letters, when he couldn't go himself, one tellin' a sick man he'd better make his will, and the other telling a dude from the East he was healthier than a mule. Put 'em in the wrong envelopes! The dude made his will and died, and the sick man got up and ate a steak. Never felt another pang or sorrow."

"Sure," agreed the Vizier, in a voice that did not consider argument worth while.

"And that's what happened to the Major," the Emir went on placidly. "He thought the milk was poison, and he thought it so hard

that for a while it *was* poison, and it acted according!"

"It's a fierce world, Hank," the Vizier conceded non-committally. "And it'll be daylight in an hour. God help us in the mornin' when Miss Vanburgh gets us! I'm glad you're the Emir and not me."

The troubled statesmen slept.

Meanwhile, two men of simple passions and simple methods of expressing them prepared for strenuous action.

Wearing the minimum of clothing and the maximum of razor-edged knife, Suleiman the Strong and Abdullah-el-Jemmal crept from darkness to darkness until they could see the pavilion of the Emir, wherein burned a single candle in the wind-proof *shamadan* holder that hung from a tent-pole.

Not far from the big tent, a sentry, one Gharibeel Zarrug, leaned heavily upon his rifle, his crossed arms upon its muzzle and his head upon his arms.

Rightly considering that the place of the strategist is a place of safety where he may strategize in peace, Suleiman the Strong bade Abdullah the Camel-man reconnoiter the tent and report.

Like a dark snake in the darkness, Abdullah crept to a blacker spot beside the guest-tent, whence he could see a portion of the interior of the lighted pavilion.

No one moved therein, and, after a period of patient observation, he crawled, writhed and wriggled until he reached the aperture where a hanging curtain of heavy felt did not quite close the entrance to the tent.

Perfect stillness reigned within, and a silence broken only by the sound of breathing.

How many breathed?

IT was unfortunate, but intentional on the part of the occupants, that the light hung just where anyone entering would see nothing but the light, the back of the tent being in darkness, and the front well-lit.

Abdullah acepted the situation and moved slowly, silently, almost imperceptibly, across the lighted carpet. Once the light was behind him, he saw that the Emir el Kebir and the Vizier el Habibka lay on their rugs, sleeping the deep sleep of the innocent and just; the Vizier the nearer to him.

What about two quick stabs?

No. These were not ordinary mortals. The Vizier would, perhaps, make some sound as he died, and the Emir's great arm would shoot out and seize the slayer. Abdullah had seen both these men in swift action.

No, he must stick to the program and obey the orders of his leader to the letter.

He writhed backward as silently as he had come, and wriggled crawling from the tent.

"He did that very neat and slick," observed the Emir, as Abdullah departed.

"Not bad," agreed the Vizier. "He's a bit slow, though. Sure you're not too near the side o' the tent?"

"Plenty o' room, Bud; but he won't bother to come under while he can come through the front door. See his silly face?"

"Nope. I allow it's that Suleiman person that the Hadji was talking to Boje about."

"Guess again, son. Suleiman the Strong's twice the size of that galoot," and the Emir yawned hugely.

"What you reckon he's gone for, Hank?"

"Why, his bag of tools or his plumber's-mate, I s'pose."

"Wish he'd hurry up, then. I'm real sleepy. S'pose we'd better hang Mister Gharibeel Zarrug bright an' early tomorrow."

"We'll hand him over to Marbruk ben Hassan and the body-guard. They can use him for a little court-martial *mejliss*. Keep 'em happy all day."

"Poor Mister Gharibeel will be Mister Skinned-eel time they're done with him. They'll treat him rough."

"Treat him not to double-cross; but it's poor old Hadji Abdul Salam that oughta hang."

"Sure. He's a bad ole possum. G'night, boy."

"THEY are both there, Sidi," whispered Abdullah the Camel-man to Suleiman the Strong. "Sleeping on their rugs like drunken *kif-smokers*, but the Emir lies beyond the Vizier and cannot be reached. El Habibka must die first." And he proceeded to explain exactly the position of affairs and of the victims.

"Now, listen — and live," growled Suleiman when all was clear. "Go you back into that tent and crouch when you can strike home, when the moment comes."

"When will that be?" asked Abdullah, whose knife was brighter and keener than his brain.

"Listen, you dog," was the reply. "Crouch ready to strike El Habibka at the moment I strike El Hamel. Watch the tent-wall beyond him. I shall enter there. And our knives will fall at the same moment. As your knife goes through El Habibka's heart, clap your left hand upon his mouth. They must die together and die silently. Then we flee back to the *fondouk*, and tomorrow I will appear to my friends and proclaim myself Sheikh Regent of the tribe."

"And I shall be camel-man no more," said Abdullah.

"No, you will not be a camel-man after tomorrow," agreed Suleiman, and carefully repeated his instructions.

"Now," he concluded, "dawn's left hand will be in the sky in half an hour. Remember what will happen if you bungle. . . ."

KNEELING beside the sleeping Vizier, Abdullah-el-Jemmal poised his long, lean knife above his head and stared hard at the tent wall beyond the recumbent form of the Emir.

In his sleep, the Emir rolled his heavy head around and lay snoring, his face toward the very spot at which Abdullah stared.

A bright blade silently penetrated the wall of the tent. Slowly it traveled downward and the head of Suleiman the Strong was thrust through the aperture as the knife completed the long cut and reached the ground.

Gently Suleiman edged his body forward until his arms and shoulders had followed his head. As he raised himself on his elbows, Abdullah lifted his knife a little higher, drew a deep breath, and, ere it was completed, the silence was horribly rent by the dreadful piercing scream of a woman in mortal anguish. A rifle banged.

Abdullah, unnerved, struck with all his strength, and his wrist came with a sharp smack into the hand of the waiting Vizier, whose other hand seized the throat of Abdullah with a grip of steel.

Suleiman, with oaths and struggles, backed from the tent, and the Emir, bounding across the struggling bodies of the Vizier and Abdullah, rushed from the tent, with a low exhortation of:

"Attaboy, Bud! Bust him up," and dashed around the tent in time to see Suleiman the Strong drive his knife into the breast of a woman who grappled with him fiercely just as El R'Orab sprang upon the slayer from behind.

Another woman stood and shrieked insanely, sentries came running, and

the French officer burst from his tent, sword in hand.

The murderer was secured after a terrific struggle and bound with camel-cords.

As soon as the Emir had shaken the shrieking woman into coherence, it was learned that it had become the custom of the Sitt Leila, who slept badly, to rise and walk in the hour before dawn—"When she had the world to herself," as the old woman pathetically sobbed, "and unseen could pass the tent of the Emir and pray for blessings on his sleeping head."

On this occasion, as they went by the road that ran behind the Emir's pavilion, they had seen a man lying prone, with his head beneath the tent-wall and inside the tent.

Realizing that this could mean but one thing, the girl had uttered a terrible scream and thrown herself upon the man. She had seized his foot and held on with the strength and courage of love.

The man, moaned the old Bint Fatma, had kicked and struggled, knocking the girl down, had wriggled out backward, risen, and turned to flee, as the girl again sprang at him and clung like Death.

As gently as any mother nursing her sick child, the big Emir held the dying girl to his breast, her arms about his neck, her eyes turned to his as turn those of a devoted spaniel to its master.

And if ever a woman died happily, it was the little Arab girl.

YUSSUF Latif Fetata arrived at the double, with the guard, and, even in such a moment, the man who had made them what they were noted with approval that it was a disciplined guard under an officer, and not a mob of Sudanese following an excited Arab.

"Keep that man here and hurt not a hair of his head," ordered the Emir. "I return," and he strode away, with the dead girl in his arms, to the tents of Dawad Metata.

As he came back the Vizier emerged from the pavilion.

"Sorry, Hank," he whispered. "I croaked him."

"Good," growled the Emir. "You'll see me finish the other."

And it was plain to the Vizier that his friend was in that terrible cold rage when he was truly dangerous. He himself had enjoyed that for which he had recently expressed a wish—an intimate and heart-to-heart discussion in a righteous cause and with a worthy foe.

Abdullah had really put up quite a good show, the Vizier considered, and it had taken several minutes and several good twists and turns and useful tricks before he had had his visitor where he wanted him—clasped immovably to his bosom with his hawser-like right arm, while his equally powerful left forced the assassin's knife-hand back and over—until the hand was far behind the shoulder that it almost touched, and was curiously behind the sharply crooked elbow, in a position that Nature had never intended it to occupy.

Abdullah screamed like a wounded horse as the arm and joint snapped. The knife fell from his hand, and the Vizier seized his neck in a double grip. Minutes passed.

"That'll learn you, Mr. Thug," grunted the Vizier, and released the murderer's throat.

But, alas, it was the final lesson of his unlearning misspent life.

"LET the guard charge magazines and form single rank," said the Emir to Yussuf Latif Fetata, who, beyond a greenish pallor of countenance, showed nothing of what he felt. None would have supposed that this

stoic had just beheld, borne in the arms of another man, the dripping corpse of the girl for whom his soul and body hungered.

"If the prisoner tries to escape, give him fifty yards and a volley."

The Emir then bade El R'Orab and the sentries who had seized Suleiman the Strong to unbind him and to chafe his limbs.

"Do you thirst, dog?" he asked.

"For your blood, swine," was the answer.

The Emir made no reply, but waited a while, that the prisoner's strength and the daylight might increase.

"Give him his knife," he said anon, and gripped his own.

The Vizier drew his revolver and stood near Suleiman the Strong.

"Now, dog," said the Emir, "see if you can use your knife upon a man, not upon a girl, nor a sleeper, this time, Suleiman the Jackal, the Pariah Cur, the Detested of God."

THE two men stood face to face, the giant Emir and the man whose strength was a proverb of his tribe, and the staring breathless onlookers saw a fight of which they told each move and stroke and faint and feature to their dying day.

"Yea," said El R'Orab the Crow later to Marbruk ben Hassan, who, to his abiding grief, had been absent on patrol, "it was the fight of two blood-mad desert lions, and they whirled and sprang and struck as lions do.

"Time after time the point was at the eye and throat and heart of each, and caught even as it reached the skin. Time after time the left hand of each held the right hand of the other, and they were still—still as graven images of men, iron muscle holding back iron muscle, and all their mighty strength enabled neither to move his knife an inch.

"Then Suleiman weakened a little and our Lord's right hand pressed Suleiman's left hand down, little by little, as his left hand held Suleiman's right hand far out from his body. Slowly, slowly, our Lord's knife came downward toward that dog's throat, inch by inch—and Suleiman sweated like a horse and his eyes started forth.

"Slowly, slowly his left hand grew feeble, and the Emir's hand, which Suleiman held, came nearer, nearer to Suleiman's throat.

"There was not a sound in all the desert as that blade crept nearer and nearer, closer and closer, till Suleiman uttered a shriek, a scream, even as the poor Sitt Leila Nahkla had done, for the Emir's point had pricked him, pricked him, right in the centre of his foul throat.

"And then we heard the voice of our Lord saying, *'Leila! Leila! Leila!'* and with each word he *thrust,* and *thrust,* and thrust till Suleiman gave way, and we saw the knife point appear at the base of that murderer's skull. Right through! *Wallahi!* Our Emir is a *man!*"

And from this Sixteenth-Century atmosphere of primitive expression of primitive passion, which from time to time still dominated the Oasis, the Emir slowly returned to the Twentieth Century and received the concise approving comments of his Vizier.

AND it was an entirely Twentieth-Century young woman they found awaiting them in the Emir's pavilion when they reentered it an hour later, after visiting the tents of Dawad Fetata, and then seeing the bodies of Suleiman the Strong and Abdullah the Camel-man dragged away by a washerman's donkey, followed by an

angry crowd that cursed the evil carrion.

Miss Mary Vanbrugh requested the privilege, if not the pleasure, of a private interview with the Emir el Hamel el Kebir, and the Vizier departed very precipitately to his own tents.

The Emir's subsequent account of the interview confirmed the Vizier's preconceived opinion that it was well worth missing.

"I told you I took the blame for that foolishness, son," the Emir said, "and I cert'nly got it. I thought I knew the worst about my evil nature, and I thought I'd said it, too. I was all wrong. I hadn't begun to know myself till Mary put me wise to the facts."

"And all because old Bojolly's got too much imagination and the Lord has blessed us with the gift of good poker faces!" observed the Vizier. "Did you tell her it was only our fun, an' we were tryin' him out for her?"

"She said she wished *he'd* tried *us* out with a gun. And who were we to presume to think her Major De Beaujolais wasn't the world's noblest and best? So I said he surely was a noble gentleman and that we were coyotes or worse. She said I was quite right, and when I'd said some more she began to get friendly. Friendly enough, anyway, to tell me that she and the Major are going to get married as soon as they get away from us savages, back to civilization, and that they're going to start right off, this very day."

"Maudie, too?"

"No. Maudie told Miss Mary wild camels won't drag her away, and Miss Mary agrees. She's coming to our second wedding. In Zaguig it's to be. There'll be a Mission there before long."

The Vizier grunted. "You an' Maudie'll take a lot o' divorcin' by the time you're finished gettin' married." Another grunt. "And I s'pose I'll die an ole bachelor."

"Sure, Bud. Girls are discernin' critturs. But you *might* not, at that. You might get hanged young."

CHAPTER XXXII

ET VALE

THE imposing caravan and escort of Major Henri de Beaujolais and Miss Mary Vanbrugh had departed, and a gentle sadness was settling upon the soul of the Sheikh el Habibka el Wazir who was about to be left alone, alone in a populous place, while the Emir departed on his honeymoon.

That fore-thoughtful man had caused a beautiful camp to be pitched in a beautiful place far off in the desert, and thither he and his bride would ride alone after a ceremony and a great wedding-feast. Ride "into the sunset, into Paradise"; Maudie and her Sheikh! Dreams come true!

THE Emir and the Wazir sat alone for the last hour of the former's bachelor life, and a not too-poignant melancholy informed the Vizier's voice as he said:

"Women always come between men an' their friends, Hank. I reckon I'd better hike before Maudie does it."

Buddy," replied the Emir, "you're a fool. You always were. If I didn't know Maudie'd love you pretty nigh as much as she does me, I'd never have asked her to marry me. I wouldn't do it now if I thought it would make any difference to us. We're like Saul and David, very beautiful in our lives and in our marriages not divided. Why, Maudie herself said it was almost like

marryin' two Sheikhs, what she's been set on all her life."

"What—marryin' two Sheikhs?"

The Emir continued unheeding:

"I've got something to tell you. Something about Miss Vanbrugh that I promised her most solemn I wouldn't tell anybody."

"What do you want to tell me for, then, Hank?"

"Because you aren't anybody, see? So cheer up, you droolin' crepe-hanger. You know I said I'd give my hand for you and her to marry, if you loved each other?"

"Yup. And why was that, Hank?"

"Because she's my little sister, Mary! Doesn't that sound like hell?" The Vizier sat bolt upright on his rug and stared open-mouthed at his friend.

"What're you handin' me?" he asked feebly.

"Facts. She's my little sister, Mary."

"What a horrible liar you are, Hank. When did you recognize her?" whispered the Vizier and collapsed heavily.

"The moment the Major said, 'Meet the Sitt Miriyam Hankinson el Vanbrugh'."

"Then that's your name, Hank!"

"Sure! My name's Noel Hankinson Vanbrough!"

"Sunday socks o' suffering Samuel! That's the first interestin' thing ever I come across in a dull an' quiet life. I surely thought you was born-in-the-bone an' bred-in-the-butter plain 'Hank'."

"I'd forgotten it till Boje mentioned it, Bud. And I'm glad now he did. I need my name to get married with."

"Won't she tell him?"

"No, you old fool. Don't I keep on tellin' you she'd do any mortal thing rather than let Major De Beaujolais know that he's been the victim of the world's biggest leg-pull an' spoof. He'd die of misery and shame, thinking the whole world was laughing at him. He takes himself mighty seriously. And he's goin' to have you an' me come to Paris to meet the President of the French Republic if we keep the treaty nicely."

"Why cert'nly, very proper, but did he recognize you?"

"She says she took one look at my big nose—it's got a little scar on it, as p'raps you may have noticed, and my gray eyes and thick black eyebrows, an' then looked for my busted finger. I got the top shot off'n that when Pop an' me an' the boys were chasing horse-rustlers off the range. She knew me most as quick as I did her."

"Why, you didn't tell me, Hank?"

"Because she made me swear not to tell a soul. She never told Maudie either. She was scared stiff some one might make a slip, an' old Boje come to know. She wants Beaujolais to be the Big Noise of the French African Empire some day, with her helping. Neither is she plumb anxious for it to come out that we're the two Americans that quitted the Legion unobtrusive like, down Zinderneuf way.

"They'd get us, Bud. And they'd put us up against a wall at dawn, too, and take over the Great Oasis as a going concern. All sorts of bootleggers, thugs, rollers, highjackers, gun-men, ward heelers, plug-uglies and fourflusher five-ace fakers would come into this little Garden of Eden then."

The Vizier nodded solemnly and there followed a sudden, heavy pause.

"Well, son, I'd better go and get Eve and mooch along to the *Beit Ullah*. Coming?"

The Vizier did not answer. Neither did he make any move to

follow. The Emir waited, then said almost gently:

"It isn't polite, Bud, to keep a lady waiting."

The Vizier grinned—not unlike a death's head—then followed slowly.

"Sure, Hank, sure. But"—he hesitated—"seein' you off is like walkin' behind the hearse at my own funeral."

MAUDIE, hearing a sound of harsh and hollow laughter, that was a symphony in her ears, knew that her Sheikh was at last coming to carry her away upon "a stallion shod with fire" into the sunset—into Paradise.

Her! Maudie Atkinson! A real Sheikh! Just like in the book! God was good to the good girl, after all!

THE END

(This novel, under the title of "Beau Sabreur," will be published in book form at an early date by The Frederick A. Stokes Company, of New York.)

Murder In a Dream

A Mr. Thornton, in a nightmare, saw his gardener murdering his cook. He awoke with a start, and trying to put the matter out of his mind, succeeded in falling asleep again. No sooner had he closed his eyes than the same picture returned to his imagination, with the same startled awakening.

This time, however, he was so impressed by the vivid reality of the dream that he arose, threw on a dressing gown, and resolved to go to the spot indicated in his dream. The morning at this hour, four o'clock, was clear moonlight and frosty.

He had to pass through the kitchen, and in it he was amazed to find his cook, up and dressed as though ready for a journey. She told him the reason was that she was going with Mark, the gardener, to a neighboring village to be married, and that he was waiting for her at the end of the garden, with a conveyance.

Mr. Thornton said he had no objection to the marriage though he might have been told, and asked her to wait a few minutes while he went out and spoke to the gardener.

He went to the end of the garden. There was no sign of Mark or his horse and wagon. As the nightmare still lingered with him, he made up his mind to go to the spot where he had seen the murder in his dream, a copse a little way off.

He went there cautiously to discover a man engaged in a strange operation, digging hastily. So absorbed was he in the task that Mr. Thornton came up to him, and with horror-filled eyes beheld a newly dug grave. He caught the digger suddenly and violently by the shoulder. The wretched man looked around, shuddered, and fainted dead away, as he realized his design had in some mysterious way come to light.

The discovery so changed him that he promised to mend his ways. He married the cook and their child was born in wedlock.

Cock-Crow Inn

By TOD ROBBINS

COCK-CROW INN defiantly faces the sea. For countless years it has stood thus, holding at naught the greatest strength of wind and water, quite careless of the dazzling thunderstorms which on sultry summer evenings attack it as though with lifted sword-blades—a staunch old dwelling raised by hands long gone back into their native dust.

And on wild winter nights, when the waves thunder out their war song on the beach, when the wind screams its challenge to the sky, when all nature's resources seem bent on destruction, the windows of this hostelry twinkle cheerily for lonely travelers by land or sea. It feeds the hungry and warms the cold; and only once in all its ten-score years has it failed to ward off the spirits of darkness which, if the villagers are to be believed, infest the moaning caves of Wishbone Point.

But I must let Ben Tibbit tell you the story as he told it to me, hunched up before his fireside like a shriveled old boot, put there to dry —Ben Tibbit with the long, weazened neck and ferret eyes.

The Tibbits! There's a tribe for you—all cut in one mold, like Noah and his family out of my nephew's ark. You can't mistake a Tibbit. There's little Archibald, just learning to crawl, like a baby rattler; and there are Mother and Aunt Tibbit, fat women both. Yet get a peep at them through the tap-room window on their way to church of a Sunday; see the swing of their long, thin necks like Strassburg geese about to be fed, and you straightway know them for Tibbits. And, last of all, there's old Ben himself in his chimney corner, snuffling sin out through his nose over the Bible—a Tibbit every inch of him well-seasoned by four-score years and ten—a bent twig of the devil's briar-bush which caught in his grandmother's skirts, as he'll tell you himself after a hot toddy. What a neck the man has—long and lean as a swan's with an odd Adam's apple peeping through like a half-swallowed frog on its way to the gullet! What a slim, sly neck, twisting this way and that for all it's so wrinkled and yellow—what a neck to smother a hiccough!

Now when I first took up my quarters at Cock-Crow Inn, from the condition of my nerves which were all of a snarl like macaroni in a bowl of soup, I couldn't do the Tibbit family justice. It seemed to me that there were too many of them and all too much alike. I took a violent dislike to the breed. But this silly dislike soon turned to pity when I learned the truth of the matter.

I think that wild Hallowe'en night, when old Ben first opened his heart to me, marked the turning of the tide. What man could have withheld his sympathy? Poor old doddering chap, he had been marked at birth for the devil's fruit; he and his son and his grandson. Could he help what had befallen Nancy Greer, that wild slip of a lass who had once served a strange guest at Cock-Crow Inn in the days when the country was new?

No, nor could *she* for that matter, although she might have attended the burning of Anna Mulvane, and thus cheated the devil. But I must begin at the beginning.

AS I have said, it was a wild Hallowe'en. All day it had been blowing hard; now the waves came crashing down on the beach like falling towers. A venomous wind was abroad, a frantic, tearing wind which charged at Cock-Crow Inn, shaking the solid doors on their hinges, bellowing down the great chimney and slipping through each crack and cranny. And the outer night was filled with wandering voices. It held them all like an ebony cup—laughter and tears, joy and sorrow.

"Bad weather," said Ben Tibbit, laying his Bible aside with a sigh. "All the praying in the world won't alter it. It's Hallowe'en."

"Hallowe'en, eh?" said I. "I suppose the witches will be riding their broomsticks?"

"Aye, that they will," he muttered, uncoiling his neck and squinting up at the oak-paneled ceiling. "And there should be many to ride, for it's not like it was in my grandfather's day. In those good old times they couldn't go trapesing about just as they pleased. No, sir. Just let them cast a spell over man or beast, woman or fowl, and they had short shrift of it.

"But now, how is it? Why, folks are only too pleased to have them for neighbors. There's Witch Cabbot, who lives over by Bloody Creek. To my knowledge she cured little Archibald of warts by just a wave of her wand and yet no one puts a lighted torch to her skirts. There's no religion left in the land, Mr. Overton."

"But it was different in your grandfather's day?" I suggested.

"It was so," said he with a solemn roll of his head. "Men were men then. They didn't let the devil have it all his own way. They met fire with fire. Fourteen witches my grandfather helped drag to the stake; seventeen pirates he saw hanged by the neck. There was enough hanging and burning them in these parts to keep a good Christian satisfied. I remember that my sister's first skip-rope came off the gallows-tree, a well-tarred bit of hemp if ever there was one."

"Can you remember your grandfather?" I asked.

"And could I be forgetting him, sir, when there was not another such in all his countryside? Big and red he was, with a mane like a lion. A mighty man once his blood was up. Why, I've seen him take two sizable lads by the scruff of the neck and knock their heads together till they were silly from it, and he over eighty at the time with a back bowed by years! There never was a stronger man than my grandfather, though since his day the Tibbits have dwindled. You see, sir, the family tree has withered root and branch from consorting with ghosts and the like."

"Ghosts?" said I, sniffing a story.

"Aye, ghosts, red-handed, black-bearded ghosts! Scum of the high-seas who had made their own graves too hot to hold them! Ghosts with cutlasses in their hands and murder in their hearts! Damned souls that the devil himself would be glad to be rid of!"

"Spin me the yarn, Mr. Tibbit."

"Gladly," said he. "But first I must be asking you a question. You've been staying at Cock-Crow Inn now for over a week and you've seen every mother's son of us. Now, Mr. Overton, have you noticed anything unwholesome? A peculiar family resemblance that—sort of——" He paused and I saw his red-rimmed eyes glimmer out at me from the chimney seat. "A kind of a——"

"You mean your necks, Mr. Tibbit?" I asked, helping him out as best I could. "You've all got long, graceful necks like swans."

"Swans be damned, sir!" he cried with a sudden heat strange to come from a man who lived so close to his Bible. "To Hell's fire with your swans!"

"I was meaning you no offense, Mr. Tibbit," I hastened to add. "Perhaps you have an aversion to swans. I should rather say——" I was about to mention geese, but thought better of it.

"Never mind what our necks look like," he said with a bitter smile. "We Tibbits are all cursed with them. For five generations not one of us has got off scot free. We've prayed and we've fasted, we've worn out the knees of our britches and the very patience of God. See Archibald there, the poor little toad!"

I looked to where he pointed and saw that child of misfortune trying patiently to hang his white kitten with a piece of curtain cord. But, before I could interfere, it squirmed out of his hands and was off to the attic, leaving Archibald on his back, squalling.

"The poor little toad!" Ben Tibbit continued with a shake of his grizzled head. "Look how he lies, like a turtle!"

"You were about to tell me your story," I ventured.

"Well, then, to begin," said he, "you must know that the country was wild in my grandfather's youth. And if the country was wild, the sea was wilder. Black-hearted gentry there were afloat who swore by the Jolly Roger. Many a brave ship's crew walked the plank not five miles off Wishbone Point. Many a corpse has bumped up on the sand like a bag of grain after the rats are through with it. What from pirates and witches, a body couldn't sleep safe in his bed at night for fear he'd wake up with a slit throat in the morning, or maybe as mad as a hatter.

"NOW, of all the pirates off our coast, there was none the country-folk feared as much as Whitechapel Willie. He was a Londoner born was Willie, smooth as oil and fond of the lassies. The girls hereabouts used to quake in their beds, for he was not always content with his luck on the sea, but would come scudding in on cloudy nights, a dozen hairy lads to bear him company. Then he'd creep up to some lonely farmer's house and snatch a maid from her bed or the good wife herself, were she comely. It was a crying shame and the neighborhood was fair sick of it.

"It happened that my grandfather was courting Nancy Greer at the time and Cock-Crow Inn, in a manner of speaking. She was the only daughter of Anthony Greer, landlord here then. The girl was a fair catch and my grandfather was not the lad to let a good ale-house slip through his fingers. Besides all this, as I've often heard say, Nancy was a comely lass with a way about her to make men follow at her heels like dogs after a butcher wagon. Not that she gave any of them favors, for my grandfather was jealous to a fault and quick-tempered with rivals."

"And Whitechapel Willie?" I asked.

"Well, Willie was different," said Ben Tibbit reminiscently. "I'll not say that he didn't worry my grandfather when his black bark was seen off the Point. You see, he had the name on the high seas of being of close kin to the devil, a reputation he fostered by chewing mouthfuls of glass like they were no more than plugs of tobacco, picking up live coals between finger and thumb to drop down the necks of his crew, and swallowing sword-blades which he

claimed sharpened his wits. From one thing and another, my grandfather didn't fancy him much as a rival. And so when Willie was finally caught and hanged on the beach, he lent a hand to the business, with a grin on his face."

"So Whitechapel Willie was caught and hanged," I said a trifle regretfully.

"He was so. And my grandfather, who was appointed hangman that year, slipped the halter about his neck as pleased as Punch, the more especial as Nancy Greer was looking on and Whitechapel Willie was rolling his wicked black eyes at her. Here was this bloody-minded pirate on the brink of the grave, about to be hung up for his sins like the Tibbits' wash on Monday, and him rolling his wicked black eyes at our Nancy and dancing at her like a bear on the end of a chain! It was a sight to make your blood run cold, Mr. Overton.

"'Think on your sins, wretched man!' says my grandfather, very stern, giving the halter a jerk to cut off a ribald rhyme in the making. 'Say your prayers, unhappy sinner!'

"So he swung him up as high as a kite to dance out his life in the air, and the county-folk took a long breath of relief and went about their business. My grandfather and Nancy Greer were the last to go; for there was not a man so religious as he, nor one who took more joy in a burning or a hanging. But Nancy was trembling from it and he had to throw his great-coat about her.

"'One pirate the less, Heaven be praised!' says he in a voice like a deacon.

"But Nancy Greer didn't answer him at all, just stared up at Willie who was still jigging a bit on the gallows-tree. So strange a look she had on her face, and such a wild eye along with it, that my grandfather straightway began to look about for a witch. And lucky it was for Bess Cabbot that she hadn't been born yet to pick up driftwood on the beach, for as like as not she'd have been burned with her own fagots.

"WELL, Mr. Overton, the hanging of Whitechapel kept my grandfather in good spirits for upward of a month. In those days, the Tibbit family had built themselves a house on the other side of Wishbone Point, where they did all the hanging; and he had but to cross his own doorsill to see Willie hanging as neat as a turkey-cock in Butcher Flint's window. Those were the times when the country folk hereabouts let a pirate swing for a space till the red-handed gentry offshore got a sniff of him which was sure to be good for their morals. A fine lesson it was to the lads and lassies and a sure sign to strangers that Christianity had taken deep root in the land.

"As I have said, my grandfather was pleased to see Whitechapel Willie hanging there. Not that he was puffed up with pride over his handiwork, for he was modest as hangmen go; but just because he took an honest delight in having strung up with his own hands one of the devil's kin. Pleased and merry he was to see Willie jigging against the sunset till one Hallowe'en, a hundred an fifty years ago tonight, a black Hallowe'en for the Tibbits if ever there was one.

"It was another such evening as this, Mr. Overton—a howling wind for the witches to ride on, black as the mouth of hell, with never a star aquiver. It was no night to be out, but my grandfather was not the man to be turned aside from his duty. They were burning Anna Mulvane, the Witch of Whittington Common, beside the old Court House; and he had promised to take Nancy Greer on the Pillion behind him, thinking

that the sight might put the fear of God in her. So he saddled and bridled his nag, Queen Bess, and set off for Cock-Crow Inn.

"It chanced, Mr. Overton, that he rode along the beach, which was a short cut although a bad one to follow on such a night. He had to pass under the gallows-tree before he was ten minutes in the saddle. Now, what from it being Hallowe'en and so black that you couldn't see hand before face, another man might have thought twice before taking the beach road. But not so my grandfather. On he went, singing a snatch of a hymn, not from fear but just because he was partial to holy music, thinking no doubt of the good fire where he could warm his cold hands at the expense of Anna Mulvane, when, all of a sudden, Queen Bess, planted all four feet deep in the sand and let out a snort like a dragon.

"Now he was taken quite by surprise and came within an ace of losing his grip of the saddle; yet he steadied himself after a bit and gave Queen Bess a taste of his heels. But she wouldn't move an inch, just stood with her ears laid back and shook all over. Well, being a quick-tempered man, my grandfather was about to draw his saber and give her the flat of it as a lesson in manners, when there came a flash of lightning which showed him a hair-raising sight."

"What was it?" I asked breathlessly.

BEN TIBBIT took a long pull at his pipe before he answered. His face was all working with excitement and his eyes glowed like a cat's in the dark. "What was it?" said he very slowly. "Why, I'll tell you, Mr. Overton. My grandfather had ridden up to the gallows, never knowing it at all; and that flash of lightning, like a torch out of heaven, had showed him a mighty strange thing."

"What?" I demanded.

"Why, Whitechapel Willie had gone."

"Gone?"

"Aye, there he had been hanging to my grandfather's knowledge for a good three weeks or more, as dead as a herring, swinging back and forth like the pendulum of that clock yonder, a plaything for the birds and the wind and the rain, and now, come Hallowe'en, he wasn't there any more."

"Perhaps some of his friends landed and cut him down," I suggested.

"That's what my grandfather was thinking after he'd rubbed his eyes for a bit. And hot anger rose up in the man. He had hanged Willie so so neatly and all to no purpose. So he drew out his Bible and swore a great oath on it that he'd have the heart of this snatcher of bodies before the year had run out.

"Queen Bess trotted forward bravely enough, once she had passed the gallows-tree; until she came up alongside a tall dark shape of a man striding along the beach like one in a hurry. Now my grandfather drew rein, perhaps feeling the need of companionship or maybe just to break the news about Whitechapel Willie; and the moon peeped out for a bit, like a timid bride from behind a lace curtain, and showed him that the man had his chin on his breast. Tall and thin he was, and he didn't cast any shadow; though the light was bright enough.

"And my grandfather fell to wondering who it could be, knowing most of the men in the village whom he had thrown about like rag dolls in his day. Was it Red Tim, the blacksmith? No, Tim was shorter and broader. Was it Richard Bell,

the barber? No, Bell had more of a stoop to his shoulders. Now, wasn't it Parson Peabody's wild young brother, he who was said to be mad when the moon was full? He was just such a figure of a man, silent and moody—a bad companion, but better than none on a wild Hallowe'en.

"'God be with you, friend,' said my grandfather through his nose, like a parson. 'Mayhap you're on your way to the burning?'

"'I am cold,' said the wayfarer then in a voice shrill as a crowing cock: 'Think you, good hangman, that it will be cheerful there as in the devil's kitchen?'

"'That it will,' my grandfather answered, not relishing mention of the devil's name on such a night, but making allowances for the parson's brother. 'They've planned a great fire by the Court House.'

"'Good!' cried the wayfarer with a shiver. 'Think you it could warm me, Hangman Tibbit? The cold of many a black night has eaten into my bones like quicklime.'

"'It'll warm you,' says my grandfather. 'And there will be rare sport besides. Anna Mulvane will be squalling like a dozen cats once the fire touches her.'

"And then at these merry words the wayfarer let out a laugh shrill as a cock crowing in the dawn, an unwholesome laugh, Mr. Overton, which made Queen Bess rear up from sheer fright of it. 'He, he, he!' he cried with a wicked roll of his head. 'There's a cloven hoof peeping out from under the robe of the priest!'

"'What may you be meaning by that, friend?' my grandfather asked.

"'Never you trouble your head over the matter, Hangman Tibbit, says the wayfarer with an ill favored grin. 'Stick to your trade. There's a science to it you've not quite mastered. When all's said and done, what you hang up is as likely as not to come down and be treading a jig-step on a black Hallowe'en.'

"'If you're meaning the disappearance of Whitechapel Willie off the gallows-tree,' my grandfather cried in a towering passion, 'I'll have you know that some rogue in these parts cut him down! I've sworn to clip the ears of that man if once I lay eyes on him!'

"'A coward sprinkles threats on all sides of him like a pot shaking pepper,' says the wayfarer with a sneer. 'Spur on, Hangman Tibbit, for I'm wanting only my own company.'

"NOW, Mr. Overton, had it not been Hallowe'en and he late for the burning of Anna Mulvane, and had he not thought that this impudent rascal was own brother to Parson Peabody, there's no doubt at all in my mind but my grandfather would have made short work of him. But as it was, he swallowed his righteous wrath like a dose of bitter medicine; and, wasting no more words on the matter, but just putting it down to the liquor which must be shaking up and down in the man's belly to make him so bold, he clapped his spurs into Queen Bess and was off like the wind.

"Well, it wasn't long before he rode up to Cock-Crow Inn and stamped into this very tap-room. It was a cheery place then as it is now. A great log was spluttering a bit on the hearth-stone and the easy chairs were gathered cozy about it, as if they had tiptoed out from the corners to have a friendly chat in the firelight. But there wasn't a drinking man in the place, all having tramped over the hill to the burning.

"'Nancy Greer! Nancy Greer!' my grandfather bellows like a bull that

is mating. 'Where have you got to, Nancy?'

"And in a little while she comes down the great stairs into his arm and he gives her a squeeze, fit to crack the ribs of a bear. But she, being a lusty lass, only giggles a bit and blushes a bit, and tells him that he shouldn't be carrying on so.

"And at that he takes a proud look around the room, like a man who feels he has the property in his pocket; and then he bends down and gives her a loud smack, a masterful kiss to smother an argument.

" 'That's for you, my good wench,' says he very lordly, for there wasn't every girl who could boast of such favor. 'Is your father at home, Nancy?'

" 'No, sir,' says she, dropping him a low curtsey. 'He's just stepped over the hill to the burning of Anna Mulvane.'

" 'And so he should do,' says my grandfather then as though from the pulpit. "Tis the duty of every Christian in the land. Get your bonnet and shawl, Nancy.'

"But she shakes her head at that and sets her mouth hard. 'I'm not going to the burning of Anna Mulvane, Mr. Tibbit,' says she very firm.

" 'Not going!' cries my grandfather, quite taken aback. 'What ails you, lass? Why, the whole congregation will be there and Parson Peabody is to light the fagots with his own hand! Come, get your bonnet and shawl!'

"I'm not feeling so spry, Mr. Tibbit,' says she, looking down on the floor like a sinner. 'It'll be cold by the Court House. There's a bitter wind abroad and I——'

"But my grandfather cut her short, having smelt out a lie. 'Tell me the truth, Nancy Greer,' said he. 'Out with it, girl. Why is it that you fear to go to the burning of Anna Mulvane?'

"And now she just blurted out the black truth like the silly wench that she was. 'I like Anna Mulvane!' she cried in a voice all broken with sobs. 'I don't believe she's a witch! And even if she is, I don't care! I like her!'

" 'Have a care, Nancy Greer!' says my grandfather right solemnly.

"BUT she went on for all that, words falling from her in a shower. 'Why must you be always taking me to hangings and burnings? I hate them, Mr. Tibbit. Yes, hate them! There was the time you men of the church burned poor Widow Gaffney. Mind how her hair flamed up, Mr. Tibbit, and how she clawed at it? I see her yet in my dreams!

" 'Nancy Greer,' my grandfather said very sternly, 'did I not know you for a good lass at heart, these wicked words might go hard with you. Mayhap you're bewitched. Come, I'll wrestle with the devil that possesses you. Nancy, bring me a bottle of wine and we'll sit ourselves down by the fireside and say a few prayers to break this enchantment.'

"Now, Mr. Overton, Nancy Greer calmed down in a jiffy as is the habit of most lasses once they get their own way. She was quick to bring him a bottle of her father's best wine, for it was a night when good spirits could do no harm. And my grandfather was nothing loathe to make love, and toast his toes a bit. Perhaps he had grown a trifle weary of burnings, like a man who has gone too much to the playhouse. Besides, if the worst came to the worst, he could still get to the Court House in time to pocket a handful of ashes for luck.

"Well, there he sat, Mr. Overton, with Nancy on his knee, sipping Anthony Greer's rare old wine and thinking of the day when he'd be master of Cock-Crow Inn, when, all

of a sudden, there came such a loud peal of thunder that the whole house seemed to shake from it. And on its heels there followed a great blast of wind that rattled the window-panes in their sockets and blew open the oaken door as though the devil himself had put a shoulder to it.

"'God save us!' cried Nancy, jumping up in a fright. 'I'd best be bolting the doors and the windows!'

"But my grandfather answered nothing at all, just sat back pop-eyed."

Ben Tibbit paused to light his long clay pipe and I took advantage of his silence to stir the fire a bit. We were both needing the warmth and cheer of it.

"What ailed your grandfather?" I asked at length.

"Matter enough, sir," said he between puffs. "A strange guest had been blown into Cock-Crow Inn. I say *blown*, Mr. Overton, for it was like that. In he came, swirling from side to side like an autumn leaf caught in a gale. For all he was so long and lean and solemn, there was a strange, unwholesome gaiety about him, like a wreath of smoke hanging over a bonfire."

"What manner of man was he, Mr. Tibbit?" I asked.

"Well, at first it was hard to make out, for he was all wrapped up in a long black coat. But after he had skipped up to the fire and stretched his arms over it, my grandfather caught a glimpse of his face.

"Long and lean it was, Mr. Overton, with a great hooked nose, poking out like a vulture's. And to make matters worse, he had but one eye as red as a window-pane with fire shining through it. The other was just a hole in his head and as black as a rabbit's burrow. But more disturbing than all was the unhealthy pallor of his skin, all soggy with damp, like a mushroom that has stood out too long in the wet.

"'God be with you, friend,' said my grandfather, not forgetting his manners. 'Are you cold?'

"'Aye, cold—cold!' said the stranger in a voice like a crowing cock. 'Think you, Hangman Tibbit, that a man can lie out for a round score of nights, blowing this way and that to every stray puff of wind like a whirligig, without just becoming as damp as a towel in a tap-room? I'm needing a bed of red-hot coals to lie on, Hangman Tibbit!'

"All this time he had been bending so close over the fire that it was a wonder his cloak did not flare up from it; but now he took a step back and began to unwind a long woolen muffler from about his neck. And my grandfather could see that this stranger's clothes were in a most shocking state. Were it not for his cloak, the man might as well have been naked. Tattered and torn were his britches and jerking as though by the claws of wild beasts; and through a rent in his hose his bare calf showed through, green and moldy. All in all, he was in no fit state to be in a lass' company; and my grandfather would have told him as much had it not been Hallowe'en.

"Now, as I have said, this scarecrow of a man was unwinding a woolen muffler which sat tight about his neck. Coil on coil he unwound; and, strange to tell, with each coil his head tilted more to one side, till at last he was grinning at my grandfather from his bony left shoulder. A most disquieting thing to see.

"Next he sat himself down and drained my grandfather's flagon without so much as a *by your leave*. 'You do yourself proud, Hangman Tibbit,' said he. 'Young women and old wine—they betoken a man whether in Heaven or Hell. Now bring *me* a flagon, Nancy Greer, and

we'll drink to your bonnie blue eyes.

"My grandfather, a proud man when in liquor, was loathe to drink with such a ragged company; but, it being Hallowe'en and no one about to mark him, he clinked glasses with this wind-tossed traveler out of the night as friendly as possible. And what from the good wine he had already drunk and what from the bumpers that followed, it wasn't long before he and his guest were as lively as limpets. He even sent Nancy down to the cellar for another bottle, and she was loathe to be going for fear she'd be missing some of the stranger's sallies. For it seems that this ragged fellow had a rare humor, once you forgot his wagging head and his ruby-red eye.

"The tales he told them, Mr. Overton, would fairly make your sides split—about shiploads of people walking the plank like a flock of sheep on their way to the butcher's, about wild pranks played at sea when strong men were hanged up by their toes to the rigging, about how one Captain Shark had his own cook served up to the crew in the form of apple dumplings. And my poor grandfather tried to hold his own with him, telling of the humorous sights that he had seen at the hangings and burnings hereabouts. But he couldn't make a go of it. Also he began to think that his roving red eye fell on Nancy more than was seemly.

"'On your feet, Hangman Tibbit!' the stranger cried out at last with a flourish. 'On your feet, you lubberly swine, for I've a toast for you!'

"'I'll have you know—' my grandfather began in a towering passion. But he got no further with it, for this ragged stranger drowned him out with small respect and less manners. The ditty he sang in his high crowing voice ran something like this:

"'Here's to Whitechapel Willie who sails the four seas,
He's known from Calcutta to Florida Keys,
With a puncheon of rum and a dirk in each hand,
In a snug little lugger a league from the land;
For wine and women and plenty of duff
He'd sink the whole fleet and not call it enough.
For he's Whitechapel Willie who sails the four seas,
Well known from Calcutta to Florida Keys.'

"'Whitechapel Willie!' my grandfather cried. 'Did you mention the name of Whitechapel Willie?'

"'Aye, pumpkin-head,' said the stranger, 'I *did* sing of Whitechapel Willie. What then, pop-eyed hangman?'

"NOW, Mr. Overton, there's no doubt at all in my mind but that my grandfather would there and then have slain this fellow had it not been for a strange trick of memory which tormented him. He had even laid his hand on his sword-hilt, so far had he gone in the matter, when something familiar about this stranger's face held his arm back. Where had he seen that hooked nose before? He must find out before he slew him, or else his curiosity might go begging through life. Thus he reasoned and once more swallowed his anger.

"'I hanged Whitechapel Willie with my own hands not a month back', says he, rather proud.

"'And did you so, Hangman Tibbit?' cried the stranger with a wink at Nancy. "Blast your soul for a bungler! I was passing the gallows-tree not an hour gone and there was no fruit on it for bird or beast. Mayhap Willie has slipped your halter come Hallowe'en'.

"'When I hang a man he stays hanged!' my grandfather bellowed. 'The devil himself could not slip my noose!'

"'Is it so?' said the stranger with a sneer and a smile. 'Nancy, my dear, surely a dead man is of more worth to a lively lass than this hulking, hiccoughing homespun. Sit you down on my knee, girl, and I'll sing to you of Whitechapel Willie:

"'Now Whitechapel Willie was wooing a wench,
Pipe up on your flutes and your fiddles;
He sat her down on a cobbler's bench
Sing high, sing low, sing——'

"But now my grandfather drowned him out with a volley of oaths which would have done justice to any pirate. He was fair foaming with rage, for out of the corner of his eye he could see Nancy creeping over toward this stranger like a bird once the snake beckons it. Something had to be done to keep this rogue in his place, or it might very well be that he'd have Cock-Crow Inn and the girl in his pocket.

"'Draw, you crowing cock of perdition!' cried my grandfather, overturning the table just to show what manner of man he was. 'Sing your dirty gutter songs, will you!'

"And at that the stranger leaped to his feet. 'So that's your tune, Hangman Tibbit!' says he. 'Well, we'll both dance to it!'

"Now, Mr. Overton, it wasn't longer than it would take a man to call for a bottle of Scotch before swords were out and sparks flying. Back and forth it went, blade crossing blade in thrust and parry, a great roaring of oaths from my grandfather and a smashing of chairs and tables that stood in his path. Up and down this very tap-room they fought, the swords all aquiver to be killing and the black night peeping in through the lattice.

"My grandfather was a grand swordsman, as he's told me himself in this very chimney corner. Few there were who'd faced his saber and lived to tell of the matter. But tonight—what from it being Hallowe'en when devils are strong and saints are weak—he was far from having his own way of it. This scare-crow of a man was like smoke to prick with a sword point. Light he was as thistle-down, short at one moment and tall at the next, leaping about as nimble as a goat and with no sign of tiring. And now cold suspicion of the truth flowed into my grandfather's brain. Surely if this man were of flesh and blood he'd have been stretched on the floor long since. Perhaps it was Satan himself; or, at least, his lieutenant.

"But the Tibbit family are not easily daunted. Blinded with sweat he was and shaking; but he fought on gallantly for all that, crying loudly on God to protect him. And then, as though in answer to his prayers, the point of the stranger's sword wavered; and my grandfather, thrusting forward with a hymn of praise on his lips, saw the blade of his saber slip into the rascal as though he were made of green cheese; saw it slip in like a skewer in mutton and saw it come out again, all bright and shining.

"Now, being a man of quick perception, he knew for certain that something was amiss. Here was the blade of his saber as clean as a whistle when it should have been red and dripping; and here was this ragged whisp of a swordsman hopping about as gay as a canary. It was enough to put the fear of the devil in a man, Mr. Overton.

"My grandfather staggered back against the wall from the fright of it, and all the wine went out of his head. So this was what came of sitting snug in a tap-room when he should have attended the burning of Anna Mulvane. Well, he was in for

it now and no dodging the issue. If only he could get the holy Bible out of his pocket to ward off this fiend from the pit!

"BUT there was no time for that now, Mr. Overton, for the stranger was at him again like a cat on a mouse. Up and down the tap-room it went, swords rattling like the devil's dice box and my grandfather put to it to keep on his feet. Lucky it was for him that the hilt of his saber was fashioned like a cross, which guarded him against the deviltry afoot. Had it not been, he would have met death with his boots on and not like a Christian in bed. But as it was, his head was swimming from the sweating fatigue of it, and his knees were clicking together like castanets, and his breath was whistling in his throat like the wind down this chimney. All in all, he was in no fit state for fence.

"Well, matters went on from bad to worse. Soon my grandfather got wandering a bit in his head. It seemed to him that the room was spinning around like a top. Faster and faster it went; and then, all of a sudden, a great gust of wind pushed the tap-room door open and out of the night came a wild, wind-tossed company.

Black hairy lads were these, all dressed in silk and laces, marching in with a swing and a swagger—wild lads who had sailed the Spanish Main, stained to the eyes with blood and treasure—rollicking bucks who would cut a throat for a bottle of grog or play a prank on a parson. In they marched, two by two, and formed a solemn ring about him—a ring of faces like you see in dreams, bearded all, with eyes red as coals in the gloaming.

"And as he fought wearily on, with hope of Heaven fast fading, the tattered swordsman before him burst out into song which the others soon raised to a roaring chorus. And now my grandfather felt that he, too, was singing, in spite of himself and against all reason:

"'Here's to Whitechapel Willie who sails the four seas,
He's known from Calcutta to Florida Keys.
With a puncheon of rum and a dirk in each hand,
In a snug little lugger a league from the land;
For wine and women and plenty of duff
He'd sink the whole fleet and not call it enough.
For he's Whitechapel Willie who sails the four seas,
Well known from Calcutta to Florida Keys.'

"And so he knew for certain with whom he had crossed swords on this black Hallowe'en and all hope flickered out of him. Also he recognized two or three of the hairy lads who looked on—gentlemen of fortune these whom he had strung up right gaily at one time or another. And now that he felt the devil had his own way with him, that it was useless to struggle further, he leaped back and snapped the blade of his saber across his bent knee. What was left of it was but the hilt, made into the likeness of a cross as I have told you, Mr. Overton. This he managed to clasp to his breast before he fell on the floor in a swoon."

Ben Tibbit broke off to throw another log of wood on the fire which was dying down to red ashes. His neck lengthened incredibly for an instant as he bent forward to warm his wrinkled old hands.

"And who was this rollicking swordsman out of the night?" I asked. "Surely, it wasn't Whitechapel Willie?"

"Aye, so my grandfather was thinking," said Ben Tibbit with a

shake of his head. "Whitechapel Willie come down from the gallows-tree on a black Hallowe'en. But hear me out first, Mr. Overton, and then you can be judging the matter.

"As I have told you, my grandfather had dropped in his tracks from fear and fatigue. How long he lay in a swoon on this tap-room floor, he never knew; but when he opened his eyes again, the place was as black as a pit. Not a candle glimmered and the log in the fireplace had sputtered out, leaving the room as damp as a cellar.

" 'Nancy!' he cried, sitting up in a fright. 'Nancy!'

"But there was no answer at all, just the whimper of the wind in the fireplace and the sad sigh of the waves on the beach. So he climbed to his feet and lighted one of the candles. Ghastly it was and silent, with broken furniture lying all about; but with no sign of woman or devil. My grandfather was fair sweating with fear.

"But he tramped from attic to cellar, stopping every now and then, like a child in the dark, to bellow 'Nancy! Nancy!' And then out he went into the night which was graying with the first pallor of dawn.

"Long spirals of mist stole up from the grass and went creeping away in the dark; the stars were still bright overhead and winking; the wind had died down to a breath which just wagged the leaves on the birches.

"Giving no thought to Queen Bess, he tramped down to the beach where the waves were like weary sinners confessing. And standing there, his feet buried deep in the sand, he bellowed 'Nancy! Nancy!' over the breast of the sea.

"But there was no answer at all, just the sad waves confessing to the wickedness done out there beyond, and once the mournful cry of a gull.

"Well, he plodded down the beach, still fuddled in his head from the night's deviltry and not thinking or caring over-much where he might be going, when, all of a sudden, he heard a strange sound coming out of the mist far ahead. It was a shrill crowing sound like a cock makes on a dunghill, only louder and with a quaver to it which turned it into a wicked laugh most unpleasant to hear."

"Whitechapel Willie!" I broke in.

"So my grandfather was thinking and he began to run. For now, with the promise of dawn in the air and Hallowe'en about spent, he was brave enough to face man or devil. On he ran with that wild laugh still stinging his ears, till soon he saw the gallows-tree looming up black through the mist; the gallows-tree and something that dangled there, jigging a bit on the heels of the wind."

"Whitechapel Willie?" I asked.

"Sure enough, Mr. Overton — Whitechapel Willie. There he was, strung up for the world to see, the same as he had been before Hallowe'en.

"But my grandfather had spied something else which made the hair on his head ruffle up. There at the foot of the gallows, dim as a dream in the pallid dawn, was a queer shape all wrapped up in an old black cloak. Swinging back and forth like a gate in the wind, it crouched there in the dust. Forlorn and broken it was, like an old woman come to grieve on the grave of her dead; and it was only after he had stepped up to it that he knew it for Nancy.

" 'My lass,' said he, severe as a judge of the land, 'why sit you here beneath the gallows-tree?'

"But she made him no answer; just broke out into a snatch of a song which ran something like this:

"'The devil he put on the robe of a priest,
Sing high, sing low, my lasses;
So Willie and I sat long at the feast,
Sing high, sing low, my lasses.'

"'What ails you, Nancy?' cried my grandfather in a fright. 'Are you bewitched?'

"But still she made no answer, just stared up, wild-eyed, at the gallows-tree and sang another snatch of her ribald ditty:

"'Now Willie was merry as he could be,
Sing high, sing low, my lasses;
But the devil was rude to wink at me,
Sing high, sing low, my lasses.'

"Well, my grandfather clapped his great hand over her mouth, for he saw that all sense had been bewitched out of the girl and feared she might sing something for which she might have to burn, later. So he bottled up her music there and then, and, picking her up in his arms, carried her back to Cock-Crow Inn. And that about ends my story, Mr. Overton."

"But how long was it before she regained her reason?" I asked, not at all satisfied.

"Never, rightly speaking. She was always breaking out into songs about Whitechapel Willie, some of them scandalous. I remember one time when I was a mite of a lad in church with her and she piped up on a ditty which made the congregation stare, I can tell you."

"And your grandfather was willing to marry a mad woman?"

"He was so, Mr. Overton. He was wont to say that his Nancy was better than a watch dog the way she piped up if anyone stirred beneath stairs of a night. And then there was a Cock-Crow Inn to be considered. Was he going to let that slip through his fingers just because Nancy Greer wasn't as sensible as some?"

"Did he ever find out what happened to her?" I asked.

Ben Tibbit flushed and shook his head. "Yes and no," said he. "Of course, there were times when he had to close his ears to her pipings. There were ditties of hers that——. Well, the least said about them the better, Mr. Overton. She's in her grave now, poor woman. Like a cackling goose she went about Cock-Crow Inn in my childhood, mad as a hatter and merry; a handsome old dame despite her wild eyes and wilder music.

There was the savor of the sea in her, Mr. Overton, a wild, rollicking spirit which has hanged many a man but which is rare to find in a woman. A chap could hear her from the attic to the cellar when she came out full blast with one of her ditties, all about rum and murder and pieces of eight."

"But the curse laid on your family?" I broke in. "Your necks? How did you come by them?"

Ben Tibbit made me no answer. Rising painfully to his feet, he began to blow out the candles which were guttering in their sockets. Picking up little Archibald by the belt and holding him at arms' length as though he were a large snapping-turtle, he turned on the threshold for a last word.

"All families have their skeletons," said he. "Well, sir, I let ours out of the closet tonight to dance a bit for your pleasure, it being a black Hallowe'en when men grow talkative by the fireside. But I don't want you to be thinking that I'd throw mud at my own grandmother. No, sir, Nancy Greer was an honest lass; and, had she gone to the burning of Anna Mulvane, all this would not have happened. It was a slip that cost her dear and the Tibbits dearer. A good evening to you, Mr. Overton."

The Silver Man

By ROBERT W. SNEDDON

TO MY mind there is nothing finer to be seen anywhere than the prospect of Princes Street, Edinburgh, on a fine July morning, and though I have a new automobile, as often as not, I send it away from my front door and trust to my legs to carry me to my office in Charlotte Square.

I like to saunter with a look into the book shops, and into the sporting shop to see what they have in the way of trout flies, to stand and admire the bold outline of the old castle on the rock, and finish my after-breakfast cigar in peace. I know that Mackenzie, my clerk, will have my mail in order, and that I can begin a busy lawyer's day without delay. So I took my time this morning, never thinking what was waiting for me.

When I came into my room, someone sprang up from the big easy chair I keep for visitors and stood holding out a hand.

"Why, John Chalmers, what brings you here so early in the morning?" I cried. "It's a long time since you honored me with a call."

"By God, Carmichel, I never was so glad to see any man. You're the one friend that can help me," he told me.

It surprised me to see a man usually so cold and quiet in his manner in this state of excitement. He looked as if he had been traveling all night, his clothes rumpled, his hair on end as if he had been clawing at it with nervous fingers.

"Humph!" I said. "What's all this? Sit down, John, and let's talk quietly."

My visitor threw a glance of mistrust at Mackenzie, and I motioned to my clerk to leave us, though the fellow knows the anatomy of nearly as many family skeletons as myself.

"Now," I said, "what's in the wind? You're not yourself. How're your inventions? I hope you're not wanting money. There's little ready money flying about, even for flying machines. Investors are cautious these days."

John's by way of being an inventor. First it was automobiles, now it's aeroplanes, anything that speeds. It's lucky for him he has money of his own. Fifteen hundred pounds a year are his as long as he lives and can pay his income tax.

"Oh, money!" he answered abruptly. "That's not what brought me helter-skelter to you. My brain's all in a whirl. Carmichel, you've seen queer things in your day, and I've great faith in your good sense."

"Good sense," I said jokingly, "then it's not legal advice you want?"

"Legal advice!" he cried in fine scorn and sprang to his feet. "No, indeed!"

"Ah well, lawyers have their uses sometimes. Maybe you made a mistake and think I'm a doctor, John," I told him.

I was surprised to see him so moved, for while I like the fellow, there's a queer-like strain in him. I have a feeling he has more mathematics and mechanics in his make-up than heart, for all his jealous devo-

tion to Margaret. Margaret's his sister, and a fine lass."

John shook his head angrily.

"Ah well, say your say, then. I'll do all I can," I said.

"Even to coming back with me? Can you get away?" he asked eagerly.

"Well," I said cautiously, "I'm due for a holiday. Carruthers comes back from his gowf at St. Andrews today, and I can leave the minute he arrives. Carmichel and Carruthers can get along without me for a while."

At that John gave a sigh of relief.

"A bit of fishing in Galloway would do me good," I added. "What's your trouble? By the bye, how is Miss Margaret and her painting coming on?"

HE made no answer, but sat drumming his fingers on the arm of the chair, and I sat still in mine. It is never my habit to exert any pressure on my clients.

"It's Margaret," said John at last. "You know what I think of Margaret, and how close we are to each other. A better sister no man ever had. What other girl would have given up all her friends and her fun to bury herself in the most inaccessible spot in all Scotland with a man that's absorbed every hour of the day as I am? Eager as I was to have her, I feigned to be all against her coming, but no, she would come. She said I wouldn't eat, I would let things go to rack and ruin without her to look after me, and I let myself be talked into saying 'Yes.'

"She has a great influence on me, and I've sometimes wondered how much of my invention doesn't come to me from Margaret's fancies. So she came with me, and for three months things went on smoothly. I spent my days in the workshop, while she busied herself with her painting. Sometimes she'd look in on me with a suggestion, but she never cared much for the actual machines. I was all for the concrete and she for the abstract. Oh, I know it was no life for a woman and I told her so again and again."

I gave a bit of an inward sigh. I've always thought there was but one lass for me, but Margaret would never hear of leaving this brother of hers. And him, why he acted at times as if he was her prison-keeper, a queer, jealous fellow. There was some very close link between the two, a kind of telepathy of thought, almost, and he feared, apparently, someone might snap the connection.

"You know I'm responsible for her," he added sharply.

"If she heard that, she wouldn't thank you," I said angrily.

"I know," said John, shifting in his chair." She's an individual just as I am, but still, there's that feeling in my mind. I never felt it as strongly as—as lately. I saw she was beginning to fret and I suggested she should go away, and for a bit she was inclined to the advice, but all at once——" He hesitated and a wild look came into his eyes. "She's changed, yes, yes, she's changed."

"What's gotten into the man?" I wondered to myself. "A sane fellow like him!" But aloud I said composedly:

"Changed, has she? In what way?"

John put down the cigar I had given him, as though it sickened him, one of my best cigars, too. The man was in a bad way.

"Carmichel!" he said, leaning forward. "Something queer is going on. She's changed. Oh, she looks the same, but at times she acts like another being. When the night comes and she'll be reading her book, she'll stop and raise her head quickly, and a look will come into her face as if she heard a voice. I thought at first it might be something in her books that brought the look to her face, but I

came to the conclusion that wasn't it. It's though at times she was seeing into another world. You know how I could almost catch the echo of her thoughts as she caught mine, but there's some obstacle risen between us two."

"Tut-tuts, man," I protested. "You're making a long song about nothing. Margaret's in love, maybe."

I must say it gave me no pleasure to offer that suggestion.

"How could she be with a——" He stopped short and added curtly, "No, love's out of the question."

"Have it your own way," I said, a bit sharply. "So far I don't see a great deal to worry about."

"I'll speak to her, maybe a simple question, and I might be speaking to the deaf, and then all at once she'll say something that has no bearing on the matter."

"Humph!" I muttered, staring steadily at him. "There's nothing so extraordinary in all this. As I said, a song about nothing. It's the loneliness and you two all by yourselves."

"That isn't all," he continued, disregarding me. "Three times in the past week I've been awakened by her coming and going. Our rooms are all on the ground floor; in fact, the cottage has only one story. She's been out on the moors at night. The first and second time I didn't worry. There was nothing wrong in that. She's an artist and might want to get some studies. I thought of warning her, for there are dangerous holes here and there, but I kept my mouth shut.

"But the third time I heard her go out I got up and watched her out of my living-room window. She went up an incline before the cottage, and I stood there in my bare feet, wondering whether to go after her or not. Suddenly I caught sight of her dark silhouette, and, my God, Carmichel, she wasn't alone. Beside her stood something that gleamed against the darkness. Margaret stood there a moment while I gaped, then ran swiftly down the hill.

"I was so amazed by the sight of the gleaming thing on the hill, so held by my wonder, that I hardly realized Margaret was back in the house till I heard her bedroom door close softly. The thing on the hill was plain to me, as if it stood in front of me. Oh, there was no mistake!"

"What was it?" I asked, breaking my astonished silence.

John's voice rose to a harsh screech.

"A man. A silver man with wings."

"A silver man with wings," I repeated, stupefied, and stared at him open-eyed.

He must have read my mind in the uncanny way he had, for he now met my gaze with composure.

"No, I'm not mad," he said. "Far from it, Carmichel, but I am puzzled, terrified, on Margaret's account. Man, I'm afraid to lose her. What is it?"

I made no answer as I thought rapidly. If the man was mad, then Margaret must be gotten away at once. And yet John evidently believed what he was saying. The only way to find out was to go with him, and I made up my mind at once. I rang for Mackenzie.

"Mackenzie," I said, "tell William to bring the car here at once for a long run."

"I came here in my plane," John interrupted. "The bus holds two. You know we can't get near the place except on foot after we reach Dalry or Cairsphairn, and we'll save time."

"Me fly?" I cried. "You're daft. Ah well," I added, "I can try it once."

I turned to Mackenzie again.

"Tell Kirsty (that's my house-

keeper) to pack a bag with my fishing suit, and give William my rod and my fly hook, and a change, too. Hurry, man."

Mackenzie went out looking fairly astounded.

"I've seen many things, John," I said lightly, though I was terribly disturbed, "but never a silver man with wings. You've whetted my curiosity even to the point of flying in what, I might say, seems to be the face of Providence.

I HEARD my partner, Carruthers, come in, and went through to him with the news that I was off on a jaunt, though I didn't confide in him, and when I got away from him and his golf talk I found William at the door with the car and my gear, and John and I set off to Leith.

I will be honest and say that I stood looking at the ungainly imitation of a dragon fly, that John called his bus, with a sinking feeling at the pit of my stomach, but William, my chauffeur, was looking on. He had served his time with the fliers, and I had my self-respect to maintain.

"Here, my lad," I said, "make yourself useful. Here, help me on with these"—the helmet and sheepskin coat John handed me. "Then you can go back and say to Kirsty you saw a respectable lawyer carried away in a fiery chariot by the Deil."

Foolish talk, no doubt, but I had in mind to rouse John out of his dark mood. It was just as well he should get his mind on his piloting and nothing else.

I stepped in behind John. William gave the propeller a spin, and we were off, roaring and snorting.

Of my flight I have no very distinct recollection, except that, passing over some colleries, iron foundries, heaps of slag and the like, I shouted forward:

"Man's inventions. A blot on the landscape."

He paid no heed to me, and I muttered to myself:

"Ah, my man, you scientists will leave us nothing much. The time will come when the artists and the men of imagination will be wiped off the earth."

Mountains, lochs, and wastes lay below us now, as we finally checked our speed and I stared over the side.

"What's that?" I shouted. "Like a great hand spread over the moor!"

He turned his head.

"Shadow of a range of hills—the Merrick. They call it sometimes 'the fingers of the awful hand.'"

And indeed it gave me a queer feeling to see it, as though it waited for something to fall within its clutch.

"Hold tight!" cried John. "We're going down into the Cauldron."

We went down till with a bump we struck a flat stretch of moor, along which we ran a bit before we stopped.

"Here we are," said John, stepping out. "We made good time."

I looked at my watch.

"You have that," I assured him, as I stretched my legs and stood looking about me in this hollow of the hills. A bit off was a cottage of whitewashed stone, and beside it a wooden shed with a tall, tin chimney. All around us, like a great cage, were the hills, wrapped in an awe-inspiring silence. I had scarcely got my bearings when from the cottage I saw Margaret come out, and her brother threw a warning at me under his breath:

"Not a word about—you know. Leave it to me."

I nodded, and it did not surprise me when she came up and greeted me with unmistakable pleasure in her bonny eyes to hear John tell her that, having gone to Edinburgh for

some tools, he had run into me and carried me off for a holiday.

IF Margaret had suspicion of anything wrong, she gave no sign of it, but eagerly began to question me as to what was going on in Edinburgh, and I believe I gave no indication of my feelings. While I was laughing and joking, I could not but help looking from one to the other, a very different pair, outwardly, for all their spiritual relationship. John, lean with a kind of sallow, grim face and cold-like eyes, and Margaret, slender and straight-backed, gentle, with her dreaming eyes that could light with laughter. A wee bit excited, just a touch of nervousness, but that was natural, I thought, with a touch of complacency that gave me comfort.

It was impossible to think of her as mixed up in anything that wasn't honest and open, and I resolved to keep my eyes on John. Three months in this place would be enough to set any man off his balance.

We seated ourselves to a lunch that my hostess got together hastily, and for a time the talk went easily.

"It's such a novelty to see a man's face," said Margaret. "I scarcely know how to behave at table now."

"You won't see many visitors here, I warrant," I said.

"No. Old James Thompson, the shepherd, and his wife, Jean, and John here are the only people I've seen for over a month," she said, with a laugh.

I felt John's foot touch mine under the table, and I threw a quick look at Margaret.

"My certes," I said to myself, "I cannot believe ill of her. If ever there was frankness and purity written on any brow, it's inscribed on Margaret's. I would as soon impute sin to one of God's own angels. The man's got a hallucination of some sort, and who wouldn't, living in the Cauldron of the Dungeon. It's giving me the creeps already."

The rest of the day went by. I inspected the workshop, and after supper there was more talk under the lamplight, but I could not help but feel that with the darkness something else had descended upon us. Our talk was jerky, and both John and Margaret appeared to be straining at keeping it going.

When Margaret went off to bed, John drew me out of the house, and we lit our pipes under the lea of a rock.

"Well, what do you think," he began. "You heard what she said about seeing no one. It's incredible to me that it is Margaret who sits there and lies. What's at the back of it all, Carmichel?"

"I'll take it to avizandum," I said at last. "In other words, John, I beg leave to reserve my opinion."

He grunted at that.

"Do you know, it's come to me suddenly. I think I have the explanation. I'm working on a new engine. Now, supposing this fellow who's lurking in the neighborhood has got around Margaret in some way, with the idea of spying on my secrets. He wants to rob me of Margaret," he added, with a vicious narrowing of his eyes.

I had a sudden contempt for the man.

"Nonsense. I'm surprised, shocked, John. Whatever has gotten into you? You're worse than an old man with a pretty young wife. Put that idea out of your head. Besides, from what you say, the man has got some contrivance of his own. What do you call it—gliders—wings, no less?"

"It certainly looked to me like that. But I see you're in your judicial frame of mind, Carmichel, so

we'll let the matter rest for the night. I haven't told you all, for much of it I can hardly realize myself, but I leave it to you to notice what is going on."

"Very well, we'll let it stand at that," I said to humor him. "Tell me, is Margaret interested in flying?"

"In an abstract way, and, as I said, she has some amazing suggestions, and I owe a lot to her. But she has said to me, more than once, she'd enjoy it better if she could just unfold a pair of wings and soar off. We had quite an argument once over some queer idea of hers that the human race once had wings, and that they were taken away because they preferred earth and its pleasures too much, and that, when we attained the truth again, the wings would be given back to us. She has come back to that idea more than once lately."

"Hum! That's quite an idea, John. Lower than the angels, but higher than man."

John grimaced with a throw of his hand toward the plane.

"I'd rather trust to my old bus."

"But tell me," I asked him, "what in the name of peace made you pick out this desolate and terrible hollow in the hills?"

"It is lonely, but that's what I wanted, for the reason that I felt sure I would be free from observation. The only people near by are the shepherd and his wife, and they're too busy to bother. We're six miles away from any road, and I was satisfied of my privacy until I came to discover this spy, this perplexing man with his silver wings. But I'll put a stop to his prying."

He stood glowering and clenching his fists.

"Humph!" I mumbled and knocked the ashes out of my pipe. "It's growing late. We'd better be in our beds, I'm thinking."

BUT when we got into the house he lit the lamp, and, to be honest, I felt maybe I shouldn't leave him alone to his queer notions. There was venom in his mind, venom in a jealous brain, that simmers to a murderous brew. My mind had been shaken out of its old jog-trot gait in the last few hours. There was something in the atmosphere of the place that was not canny, for I found myself half-believing in John's story, incredible as it had at first appeared to me. If there was a man, then he'd better not fall into John's hands. John sat staring at me with an intensity that seemed to numb my thinking powers.

"Well, well, I'd like to see this visitor of yours," I said, giving a bit of a smile, both for my own comfort and to set the man at ease, "but I warn you, John, I'm hard to convince, as you——"

I stopped short and looked at him as he arose and with a warning gesture commanded my silence. I gazed at him, hypnotized.

The rushing sound outside which had startled me ceased. There was a loud whirring, then a strong flapping noise that died away into the distance.

"What was that?" I asked, awe-stricken. "What kind of bird could that be?"

John bent forward and laid his hand on my knee. His eyes blazed into mine with such a look as once was written on the face of Cain.

"Now do you believe, Carmichel?" he asked, and I felt a cold shiver run up my back. "You've heard it, some day soon you'll see it."

"See what?" I asked testily, but I knew the answer before it came huskily:

"The silver man with wings."

I AROSE from my bed next morning to find the sun streaming in at the

little window of my low, white-washed room, and its brightness had never been more welcome.

I had gone to bed with all my theories topsy-turvy. Here I had been consoling myself with the notion that I could put my finger on John Chalmer's trouble, and that the whole matter which had upset him would yield to an explanation that was entirely commonplace. What more likely I said, and with that heart-burning, I needn't add, that Margaret had fallen in love with some young man, and that her long-maintained scruples about leaving her brother with his exaggerated idea of guardianship to shift for himself had prompted her to make a secret of the matter until the time was ripe for disclosure. But this thing I had heard, in surroundings where even the sanest man might give way to queer fancies, had given me a setback in my theories. Indeed, I felt that, short as had been my own stay in this wilderness, I was falling under the same influence. There was more in the business than I could fathom.

I came to breakfast with as good a mien as I could command, and we arranged to dispose of our day. John was going to work, while he insisted Margaret should take me out and give me a chance with my rod to get some trout for supper.

As Margaret and I left the cottage far behind us, I could not help feeling again the menacing pressure of those rocky ramparts which encircle the moor, Mulwhachar, The Dungeon and Craignnaw, the towering precipices of Milldown and Millfire, and the green slopes of Caserine. If there is a spot on the globe more remote and primeval than this monstrous pit in Galloway, may I never see it! Civilization had passed it by untouched. It reeked of the evil days when man worshiped and paid bloody tribute to the dark gods of Nature.

The sun was warm, and its rays sparkled on patches of water here and there. The sky was blue with drifting clouds, serene and calm, but there was that about us which spoke of mysteries not to be disturbed.

I was amazed to find myself stop now and again with an accountable shudder in the midst of my attempts to laugh and joke with Margaret. It seemed to me that Nature in the grim and majestic form it took here in great masses of rock, and in the silent crouching aspect of ink-black pools and deceptive morasses suffered our presence here with just the barest indifference. An incautious word or deed and, like a springing monster, it would be upon us, crushing us puny mortals in a great and awful hand.

"What is the matter with you, Donald?" Margaret asked at last. "You keep turning around."

"To be honest with you, Margaret," I told her, half ashamed, "I feel this is no place for a decent lawyer body. Those hills seem to resent my being here. I have an uncanny feeling one of them is going to wrest itself from its base and come chasing after me."

She sat down on a rock and laughed merrily.

"I never felt so much at home anywhere," she said. "At first I was frightened just like you. The silence weighed on me, and the—I don't know quite how to express it—well, just what you said—the resentment of the hills terrified me, but now I have no fears."

"Nature has taken a fancy to you, my lass," I said. "Besides, maybe you have secrets of your own to keep you company."

But she did not respond, and I tried no other way to get her confidence.

"Here's a likely burn," I announced. "I'll try a cast."

I set up my rod and chose a fly with care. Ah, that was bonny fishing. I had a fine basket in a couple of hours.

IT was while we were eating our sandwiches that Margaret, with some hesitation, began to speak of her brother.

"You're a man of wide experience, Donald. Will you tell me something?"

"I have been accounted cunning in my day," I told her modestly, "though I'll not pretend to the cleverness of old Ulysses. What is in the back of your mind?"

"I'm worried about John. Do you think he's working too hard? Sometimes I find him staring at me so strangely I'm almost frightened. Several times I've thought he had something on his tongue to ask me, but he has never said anything out of the ordinary. But I feel he wants to. You know we're so close to each other that we can almost share our thoughts without a word being said."

"Oh, never heed him, Margaret," I assured her hastily. "He's wrapped up in his whirly-gigs and wheels. No doubt an inventor like him is not to be measured by common standards. He's just dreaming about some mechanical problem. There's nothing to worry about."

"I suppose not," she said slowly. "It wouldn't be surprising if anyone got queer fancies in this place. Why, even I——" she hesitated with a strange shyness, and I prompted her with ill-disguised eagerness.

"And what might your fancy be?"

She shook her head.

"You'll laugh at me. Here I am, thirty years old and having romantic dreams like an old-fashioned schoolgirl."

"And why not?" I said, with a kind of quickening of heart. "I wouldn't be flattering you if I told you many a man would be happy to share your dreams."

"That's nice of you, Donald, but I'm afraid I'll have to be content with my—my dream man."

"Oh—your dream man. Well, well!" I said, quite taken aback.

The sly bit thing! Was she trying to pull the wool over my eyes?"

"Yes," she went on, and her voice took on a tremulous warmth. "I can't understand it. It's so unlike me, but I have the same dream over and over again. This is it. I get up from my bed at night, then I slip out of the house and go across the moor. I seem to follow the same path, and when I reach the top of the hill I see a young man standing. He is all silvery, and he has wings. Wings! Isn't it absurd?"

"Well, now," I mumbled, fussing with my shoe lace and praying my face wasn't betraying the confusion in my mind. "And — er — where might this young man hail from?"

She was looking up into the serene blue sky as if, piercing its profundity, she beheld a vision which enthralled her.

"I suppose from up there," she said, half to herself.

I must have emitted some startled exclamation, though I have no memory of it, for she lowered her eyes and looked at me frankly.

"I don't mean an angel," she said quickly.

"Oh, no! No!" I said.

"Did you ever think, Donald," she continued, "that at the bottom of the sea lives a world of sea things that once in a great while are found or brought up to the surface. Why shouldn't there be something like that in the upper air: living things, creatures of a higher order than exist on earth, flying creatures."

"How about their breathing?"

She countered my question.

"How about the fish at the bottom of the sea where a man would be crushed to death by the pressure?"

"Bless my soul," I cried, waking myself from a sort of stupor that was affecting the working of my wits, "I didn't know you were a scientist."

"I'm not," she protested. "I'm an artist; that's someone with imagination."

"And what does the young man do, pray?" I asked.

"Nothing. Just looks at me gravely, and then I go away. It's all so odd. I can't understand it, but, don't laugh at me, I've made a painting of him."

She flushed and looked away.

"My dear," I said, giving her hand a pat, "never mind what anyone says. Have your dreams."

"Oh, but, Donald," she cried all at once, "what would you do if you began to find part of your dream was true."

"That would depend," I said cautiously, moved to see her agitation. "Now what part of your dream turns out to be reality?"

She hesitated a little before answering in a low voice:

"My going out. Once I was terribly frightened. I thought I was in bed. You know sometimes when you're dreaming, you know perfectly well you're safe in bed, and not climbing mountains or crawling through endless tunnels, but this time I opened my eyes, and I was standing on the hill in front of the cottage, and"—she looked at me as if to remark the effect of her words—"I had a feeling that overhead some great bird was flying. I took to my heels and ran for all I was worth."

I was troubled how to reply, but I managed to say something. I believe I told her no doubt the rushing of the streams all about must have colored her dreams, or the whir of the grouse, and indeed, at that moment a grouse rose into the air with a startling whirring, and as for her going out, it was plain she had only been walking in her sleep.

"And, by the bye," I added, as the idea came to me, "have you said anything to John about this?"

She shook her head frankly.

"No, not a word. You know, Donald, I'm devoted to him, and he to me, but anything like this would only set him making fun of me for days, and I'm rather sensitive, and so I haven't told him. I haven't even let him see the painting I made."

"Quite so. I'd wait then," I said. "Meanwhile we'd better be getting along home."

We set off, but I fear my mind was preoccupied. I had a nice problem now to ponder over.

If she had said nothing to John, and if this was but the figment of a dream, how, then, had the idea been communicated simultaneously to two such dissimilar imaginations.

"Unless——" and here I stopped. The idea was beyond credibility.

A flying man—silver. I'd have to see this thing with my own eyes.

THE events of the past two days have so shaken me that I am loathe to set them down, but set them down in all their horror I must, while they are yet fresh in my mind.

I went to bed that evening very drowsy, for all the perturbation of my mind, leaving John glooming over a book under the lamplight, and it seemed to me I had scarcely gone to sleep before something made me sit up in bed with a start. Someone was in the room.

"Carmichel!" whispered a voice I hardly recognized. "Make no noise.

I don't want to awaken Margaret. Can you get up?"

I arose shivering, for it grows cold at night in the hills, no matter how warm the day. John drew me into the sitting-room and led me to the window.

"Sh!" he warned me. "Look up—on the hill."

I blinked and looked out through the deepest little window.

"Here!" He pulled me beside him.

I gazed out, and my heart gave such a leap in my breast that I believe I would have staggered had not John grasped me. I felt the quiver of his muscles. The man was positively vibrating with the intensity of his emotion, and it seemed to pass into me as I gaped with ever-growing amazement and awe.

There upon the hill in plain silhouette was a silvery shape, the tiny figure of a man, poised as though for flight. I could even at the distance distinguished what appeared to be pinions. All at once there was a faint sucking noise behind us, and we both turned hastily to see the oil lamp flicker out. My hand touched something cold and hard in John's hand, and I knew he had a pistol. He snatched himself away from me without a word, and it came to me that his departure threatened mischief. I wheeled around to the window. The silver man had gone as though warned of danger.

With feverish haste I went to my room, slipped on some clothes and my shoes and hurried out of doors. I had scarcely set foot outside when, from the level beside the workshop, a long gray object droned its way into the air.

John had taken to the air in pursuit of the intruder on his privacy. It was plain he was bent on doing him a mischief.

The first gray of dawn crept into the sky as, like a madman, I began to run, stumbling and falling. It's a wonder I didn't break my neck over a rock or set foot in some patch of quaking bog, but Providence was with me.

OVERHEAD the plane was swooping to and fro like a hawk, circling the vault in search of this—I can find no word for it—this thing of the air. Suddenly it drove forward. I heard a report, then several others in quick succession. I heard a distant plop and a scutter of wings in a loch, as though something had fallen. The plane's droning slackened, and coming down it hovered over the dark waters, then, turning its nose about, passed swiftly between me and the hills and was gone.

I sat down plump on the hillside, stunned beyond measure. There was no mistake. From high up in the air some wounded creature had been cast into the loch—a winged creature. I tried to reason with myself, but conviction was too strong. Whatever had stood upon the hill had met death at John's hands. It was strange, but the phantasmic aspect of matter went clean out of my mind. I saw at that moment nothing but the taking of a life, and, as a lawyer pledged to justice, there was nothing for me to do but to do my duty and confront the murderer. As to Margaret, all thought failed me. A terrible thing was in front of me.

I rose to my feet unsteadily and began to retrace my steps, and as I did so I was amazed to see a flutter of white making for the loch, though on the other side of it from me.

I watched it curiously as it topped a slope and came down, going toward the loch I had been regarding with such horror, and it came home to me with a horrid conviction that within the white garment, a night-

gown no doubt, was the sleep-walking body of Margaret. At that I began to run, for it was dangerous enough for anyone in full possession of their senses to traverse the approach to the loch sown with boggy pits and quaking marsh, but for one walking in sleep the adventure was well-nigh suicidal.

I could see her now plainly, for the light had come, walking steadily, yet with a certain dainty lightness, but I was not prepared for the quickening of her pace till she was almost running, and seeing that I gathered my forces together and, arms against my aching sides, imitated her example. I must reach her before she came to the loch, but I had to come to the water edge myself and then pass around it before I could come to her.

She kept on stepping lightly from tuft to tuft, like a bird, while I floundered on. I could have sobbed like a child when I stumbled, and just drew myself in time from a slimy mess that sucked greedily at one of my legs. I struggled once more to my feet, putting out now one foot, then the other, in search of a firm foundation, and then, as I did so, the end of my pursuit came.

The horror of it is still with me, and I can scarce set it down. I saw Margaret reach the water's edge. I tried to shout, but my mind was in such a turmoil that I cannot tell whether sound came from my lips. I ran forward, without a thought of danger any more, and as I did so my foot caught in a root. I pitched forward abruptly. My head struck a rock and my senses went from me.

I came to, to find a dog's cold nose upon my cheek and, opening my eyes, beheld an old man gazing down upon me curiously.

"Man, ye chose an awfu' like place to take your rest," he said to me. "A couple of yards further on and there would be no trace of you. I came by the cottage and saw Mr. Chalmers. He's in a fair state, you gane stravaiging and Miss Margaret no in her bed. I could scarce get a plain word out of the man."

I looked up at the shepherd, for so I took him to be, in a semi-daze.

"You'll no have seen Miss Margaret," he asked, with a searching glance at me from under his shaggy gray eyebrows.

At that my senses leaped back to life. I sprang to my feet and pointed a shaking finger at the loch.

"She's there!" I said hoarsely.

"God help us a'!" exclaimed the old man. "In that black belling water. The puir lass! Whatever led her to that, puir bit lass?"

"I saw her," I went on, "but I couldn't reach her in time."

He nodded his head with a far-away look.

"The waters here have ways of their own with them that's strange to them; it's not the first——" He stopped as though afraid of betraying a secret of which he was the custodian, then added solemnly: "Boy and man, I have lived here for near to sixty years, and never yet has the wonder of the hidden things passed from me. A piteous thing, aye. I'll try and win to the loch edge, sir. Bide you here."

"I'll go with you," I said grimly.

He was about to speak when we both started and looked up. The plane had returned and was wheeling about above us.

"He'll be looking for her," said the shepherd softly. "Think ye he can see us if I wave to him?"

He raised his staff, and, as if at an imperious signal, the plane appeared to stop short. There was a puff of smoke, a sharp report, then it fell a little, fluttered like a wounded bird, tilted and plunged down. Roaring with flame, it dived

into the center of the loch. For a moment we stared at the widening circles, then I darted forward.

The shepherd's hand fell upon my arm sharply.

"Are ye daft, man?" he cried. "Would ye add another death to this morn's fell work? Stand where ye are."

I watched him pick his way with, what seemed to me, infinite caution to the water's edge. All at once he bent and gathered something into his arms. My heart stood still in my mouth as he toiled his way back. As I saw his white burden a choking came into my throat. Poor Margaret!

"Here," said the shepherd with great gentleness. "The puir lass is weet, but there's life in her yet. The water didna get intil her."

He laid her on the turf, and my heart singing with joy, I whipped off my jacket and put it about her. The shepherd said no more, but pulling out a bottle from his pocket, he drew the cork with his teeth, and let a trickle of its contents run in my lass's mouth.

"There's nothing like a dram!" he said solemnly. "She's stirring. Can ye carry her? Here, we'll take her between us."

The door of the cottage stood open and we went in. The shepherd assumed an air of great briskness.

"Now," he said, "to bed with her. There's nothing like a warm bed after the water, and I'll make a hot toddy."

I hesitated helplessly with my burden.

"Man," said the shepherd, "this is no time for squeamishness. If ye love the lass, as I see, do as I tell ye. I've brought up daughters and nursed my wife Jean. Get that weet gownd off her back and her wrapped in a blanket."

I carried out his instructions reverently. Soon the shepherd had his toddy steaming hot. I managed to get some of it between Margaret's lips, and it seemed to rouse her from the coma in which she lay. She opened her eyes for a moment, then closed them, and as she lay quiet, I tiptoed out to the shepherd.

"I'll away and get Jean, my wife," he said.

"Did you see any trace of Mr. Chalmers?" I asked.

"No. The machine was floating, but no him. Maybe better so. I'm thinking the man was going mad here. He wouldna be the first," he muttered half to himself.

I went back to Margaret's bedside and sat down. All at once I heard a startled soft "Donald!"

"Margaret!" I said, scarce able to hold my voice in control.

She began to question me, how I came there, where was John, what was the matter. I tried to quiet her, but I saw I was only making matters worse, so I told her all as it had happened—all but the part about the silver man and John's crazed apprehensions of losing his companion and inspiration. That I couldn't bring myself to do. And how it came about I don't know, but my arms were about her to comfort her and she was clinging to me.

"I feel as if I were free from a haunting dream," she said.

"There was a rapping at the door and I came out of Margaret's room like a king. It was Jean, the shepherd's wife, a well-preserved woman with a shrewd eye.

"How is your leddy now?" she asked.

"The young lady's fine!" I said stiffly, startled by the question and then my heart misgave me. The last darkness had fled with the coming of this decent natural woman. "She'll be glad to see you, ma'am."

I kept Margaret in bed all that day

much against her will, for there was that to be done at the loch that she had no need to see. We had the police over and some other folk, but not a trace of poor John's body could we get. We did make one discovery, however. One of the men working the ropes dragged a sodden mass to the shore and gave a shout!

"The auld eagle's dead. Here's the corp. Weel, he's the last we'll see in the Cauldron."

I gazed at the bedraggled mass of feathers, the mighty spread of wing of the king of the air now almost extinct in our land or at least in the lowlands. Here was a part explanation of the mystery. The beating of strong wings. Poor victim of a pistol shot from a mechanical rival.

That night Margaret showed me her painting, and as I looked at it with no sense of the rivalry I might have felt a day before, I was conscious of a strange pricking of recognition. Somewhere I had seen something unconsciously to which it bore a resemblance, but devoid of life imparted to the painting by Margaret's brush.

I said good-night and came into the sitting room for my last pipe. I sat thinking the matter over. Hallucination it must have been, communicated from one sensitive mind to the other, in John's taking material shape, in Margaret's, a more imaginative and spiritual. The atmosphere of the Cauldron, the silence and loneliness of the hills, the lurking menace of untenanted Nature had brought it into fruition, that was plain. But where had been its seed, for beginning there must have been.

And as I stood looking out of the little window, I received my answer, for once more I drew my breath with a shudder, as framed against the mirror of the darkness outside I beheld the silver man. Only beside it stood another and more usual object, a vase of wild flowers.

I wheeled sharply round to face the mantelshelf and whitewashed wall above the fireplace, and there, to banish my last doubts, stood what I must have seen but paid no heed to, a small silver figure of the god Mercury, his arms spread as though for flight. And beside it the vase of flowers, the reflection of which I had also seen in the natural mirror.

Be sure to begin

"Sinister House"

By CHARLES G. BOOTH

in our March 15 issue

Between Men of Honor

By RALPH DURAND

DINNER at Tarleton Hall was as long and stately as its setting was venerable and dignified. Men who had fought at Waterloo had sat round the massive polished mahogany table. The light from a fire of huge logs under the Adams mantelpiece flickered on a sideboard that had been carved by Grinling Gibbons. The wine in the crested cut-glass decanters had lain in Sir Reginald's cellars for half a century. It was almost natural that the views that Sir Reginald Dunbar was in the habit of expressing at his dinner-table were as patriarchal as his surroundings.

"The word 'gentleman' has almost lost its meaning," he said. "I can scarcely go out to dinner nowadays without having to pass the wine to some confounded cheesemonger who doesn't know who his great-grandfather was. I may even have to see the cheesemonger's wife go in before my own wife, if the cheesemonger happens to have been given a peerage the day before yesterday."

His shaggy snow-white eyebrows bristled above his massive Roman nose as he thought of the indignities to which men of his class were subjected in these democratic days, and he looked at his only guest with an expression that indicated that if he did not agree with him, by gad, he would have to justify his dissent.

Major Blair glanced at his hostess. It occurred to him that she would not care who preceded her into dinner as long as the man who took her in was young enough to be amusing. With her shingled hair and her short-skirted Parisian frock she looked as out of harmony with her surroundings as would a kitten playing on the Woolsack in the House of Lords. She caught her guest's glance, understood it, wrinkled her nose at him in a flippant grimace, and held up for his approval a pig she had cut out of orange-peel.

As Blair was not more than fifteen years older than his pretty hostess, he was young enough to appreciate how her husband's pomposity must bore her; but, as he was only fifteen years younger than his host, Sir Reginald regarded him as a man old enough and experienced enough to be his conversational equal.

"We all have cheesemongers somewhere in our pedigrees, sir," he said. "An ancestor of mine made a fortune by victualing the ships of Henry the Seventh's navy."

"The Dunbars of the Tudor times and for centuries before were moss-troopers," said Sir Reginald proudly. "They didn't make their livelihood by trading. They won it by lifting cattle that their neighbors across the border hadn't the pluck to defend. There never were any cheesemongers

in my family. But I'm expected to rub shoulders with them. Why, by gad, the fellow that sells me candles is a J. P. and sits beside me on the Bench!"

Sir Reginald's monthly bill for candles must have been a source of considerable satisfaction to his colleague on the Bench, for no more modern form of illumination was allowed at Tarleton Hall. Candles in massive silver candlesticks stood on the table and the sideboard and in sconces on the wall. But the darkness of the furniture in that spacious dining-room absorbed so much of their light that little was left for the illumination of the huge table.

Sir Reginald could only dimly see his wife at the far end of it. He did not notice that she stifled a yawn and looked at Blair with a smile that demanded sympathy. He did not see her take something from her vanity-bag and make a gesture as if inviting her guest to a game of catch. He did not see Blair refuse the invitation with an almost imperceptible shake of the head. But he did see Blair leave his seat and pick up the table-napkin that his wife had dropped.

The fact that Major Blair had but recently risen from a bed to which a broken leg had confined him would have exempted him from so conventional a courtesy. Lady Dunbar was much better able to pick up her own table-napkin. But by Sir Reginald's code, no woman should do anything for herself if there was a man present to do it for her.

"Don't trouble, Blair," he said, rising from his seat. "Remember your game leg."

Major Blair made all the more haste to reach the fallen table-napkin.

"My leg's almost all right, sir," he said. "Thanks to you and Lady Dunbar."

He reached the table-napkin first, but as his hand touched Lady Dunbar's a piece of stout linen-woven notepaper fell and skidded across the polished parquet floor almost as far as the door.

Lady Dunbar rose abruptly from her seat.

"Will you ring for coffee, Reginald?" she said, and crossed the room so hurriedly that Major Blair could not limp to the door in time to open it for her. As he returned to his place at the table he picked up the note with an unconcerned air and put it into his waistcoat pocket.

"I suppose, sir," he said, "that your grocer J. P.——"

Sir Reginald Dunbar, having rung the bell, now stood on the hearth-rug, his back to the fire, his hands behind him.

"I think, Blair," he interrupted, "that you will agree that you are to a certain extent under an obligation to me."

BLAIR flinched slightly. His hand trembled as he refilled his wineglass so that several drops of port spilled onto the table.

"Under a very great obligation, sir," he admitted. "Most men on finding me lying insensible under a wrecked motor car outside their gates would have contented themselves with packing me off to the nearest hospital instead of bringing me into their houses and caring for me. I owe you more than I can easily repay."

"I dislike talking about repayment. It's the sort of thing cheesemongers do. But I have a reason. You can, if you choose, discharge the debt twice over."

"Anything I can do, sir, of course——"

"You can prove to me that a most unpleasant suspicion that I have in my mind is absolutely unfounded. All I ask is that you let me read that letter that my wife tried to slip into your hand. It is now in your waist-

coat pocket. I hope that when I have read it I shall be in a position to offer you an unqualified apology for my suspicions."

"Your suspicions are quite unwarranted, sir. Lady Dunbar has never written me a line."

"Don't quibble, sir. If she did not write that note it was written by you, and you bungled your attempt to give it to her. I may say I have for some time past suspected that there was some sort of secret understanding between you and my wife. I still hope that I am wrong. If you wish to set my mind at rest, nothing can be easier. You simply let me read that note."

Major Blair sat rigid, staring at nothing. On the ceiling above him, Sir Reginald's shadow, cast by the flickering firelight, seemed to overhang and menace him. In the tense silence the Queen Anne clock in the corner seemed to be counting the seconds that passed as Sir Reginald waited for his answer.

The door opened and a footman entered with coffee on a tray.

Sir Reginald selected a cigar from a box on the mantelpiece and lit it.

"I don't think you ever told us where you were bound for when your car ran away with you," he said.

"I was on my way back to my regiment from Salisbury Plain. The G. O. C. had offered a prize for revolver shooting, open to all ranks, and my battalion chose me to represent it."

"Ah! How did you get on?"

"Very well. In fact, I managed to pull off the prize," said Blair as he helped himself to sugar. "A bombardier who made the next highest score nearly wiped my eye at the standing target, but the moving figures dished him and I beat him by five points."

"You must be a pretty useful shot. I should like to see what you can do with a pheasant."

"I don't know. My eye was in, I suppose. One has one's good days and one's bad days at target practice."

The door closed again as the butler left the room. Sir Reginald flung his newly-lighted cigar into the fire.

"I'm waiting for that note," he said.

Blair did not seem to hear. He stirred his coffee mechanically. The slender spoon rattled against the side of his cup.

"I am waiting," repeated Sir Reginald.

Blair rose and limped up and down, his hands in his pockets, his eyes on the floor. Sir Reginald, from his place on he hearth-rug, stood rigidly still. Only his eyes moved as he watched the man he had befriended limp the length from the mullioned window to the Gibbons sideboard and back again. Then Blair dropped heavily into an armchair that stood at the side of the fire.

"I am driven into a corner," he said desperately. "I admit that I have tried to make love to your wife. I grant you that it was a caddish thing to do. I have little enough to say for myself except this: I fought hard against it. But I was helpless. She was the first person I saw when I recovered consciousness. From that moment I saw her several times a day. She brought me flowers. Often when the pain was bad she read to me for hours at a time. I simply couldn't help falling in love with her. As soon as I realized it I would have left the house if it had been possible. On my honor I would.

"You must do me the justice to remember that I hadn't been here a week before I asked to be moved to a nursing home. I urged it. But you wouldn't hear of it. You seemed to think it a reflection on your hospitality. And of course I couldn't explain my real reason for wanting to go. So I stayed and fell deeper and deeper

in love. A man who is as much in love as I am isn't his own master. He can't control himself. But your wife never gave me the slightest encouragement. On my word of honor, she didn't."

"It would be in better taste," said Sir Reginald slowly and contemptuously, "if you talked less about your honor. In view of what has happened you can hardly expect me to attach much value to it.'

"Doesn't her refusal to take the note prove her innocence? You saw yourself that when I gave it to her under cover of handing her her table-napkin she threw it across the room. She was so angry with me, as she had every right to be, that she did not even let me open the door for her. I repeat, sir, that she has never said or done anything at all to encourage me."

"If you wish me to believe that you must show me the note. If it was you who wrote the note, you know what is in it. Perhaps you ask her to give you an opportunity of speaking to her in private. If there is nothing more in it than that, no reference to any clandestine understanding between you, I am prepared to believe that you only are to blame. You can prove my wife's innocence if you will. Show me the letter and have done with it."

"I can't."

"You prefer that I should believe the worst?"

Blair shifted uneasily in his chair. He looked at the floor, the ceiling, anywhere but at the fierce eyes that were fixed on his face. Just so had prisoners feared to look into Sir Reginald's eyes when he sat in his place on the Bench.

"A man in love writes silly things that he doesn't want any third person to see," said Blair sullenly.

"And so"—utter contempt for the feebleness of the evasion rang in every clear-cut syllable—"and so you would wreck my home and leave my wife's honor tainted rather than let me see whatever foolish twaddle you have written?"

SLOWLY Blair drew the note from his waistcoat pocket. He leaned forward and dropped it into the hottest part of the fire.

"So that is your answer," said Sir Reginald. "You will give me satisfaction, of course?"

"I will do anything you ask." Now that the note was irrevocably beyond Sir Reginald's reach Blair was able to look him in the face. "I will promise never to see your wife again. I will even, if you insist on it, send in my papers and go abroad."

"And be back again in three months scheming to meet my wife in secret! You say yourself that a man in love is not his own master. How could I rely on any promise you give me?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Surely a gentleman knows what is meant when he is asked for satisfaction. I want you to meet me, of course, with any weapon you wish to choose."

"It's out of the question. The law will not tolerate dueling nowadays."

"The law! Don't talk to me about the law, sir. The law is for pickpockets, poachers, swindling tradespeople. Men of our class are governed by a code of honor. If your grandfather had called out my grandfather he would have stood up to him and shot him or been shot like a gentleman. Are you going to tell me that although you did not scruple to abuse my hospitality you have too much respect for the law to face the consequences?"

Blair did not answer. He sat still, staring into the fire. The leaping flames lit up his pale face with an eerie, unnatural light. Sir Reginald watched him as intently as a chess-

player awaiting his opponent's move. Five long minutes passed. Then, after a harsh preliminary wheeze the Queen Anne clock struck nine remorseless strokes.

"Am I to call you a coward as well as a cur?" demanded Sir Reginald.

"I am thinking of the consequences to your wife," said Blair. "She would be a widow in any case; at best the widow of a murdered man. The law would certainly call it murder. We've got to face that difficulty. At the worst, do you realize Lady Dunbar's position as the wife of a man hanged for murder?"

"Some of my ancestors had their heads cut off, but none of them was ever hanged like a common highwayman. You can leave it to me to evade that difficulty. Can you suggest any other?"

"We could never persuade anyone to act as our seconds. We can't possibly ask men to stand and watch us fight, well knowing that the law will treat them as criminals for doing it, as accessories to what it will call murder."

"Between men of honor seconds are unnecessary. Though you have behaved abominably, I still think that you would fight fair."

"Give me time to think."

"As much time as you please."

Sir Reginald relighted his cigar and, not to embarrass his guest, moved slowly around the room, holding mute converse with the spirits of long-dead Dunbars whose portraits hung on the walls.

"As the challenged party I should have the choice of weapons?" said Blair presently.

"Certainly."

"And the right to lay down the conditions under which we fight?"

"You can make any conditions you please so long as you stand up to me."

Blair rose from his armchair with an effort.

"At daybreak tomorrow, then. Will that suit you?"

"Perfectly. And the conditions?"

"I will make them when we are on the ground."

"Then there is nothing more to discuss at the moment. Will you have any more wine? No? Then shall we adjourn to the drawing-room?"

Lady Dunbar looked eagerly first at her husband then at her guest as the two came into the room.

"You men have been a long time," she said.

It was obvious that she spoke with an effort, for her voice was husky and strained.

"We have been talking about the good old days," said Sir Reginald. "Will you sing to us?"

Lady Dunbar relaxed her tense grip on the arm of her chair. The color came back to her face. She rose lightly and went to the piano.

"What shall I sing?" she asked.

EVER since Blair had been able to leave his room and come downstairs, a sofa had been drawn up in front of the drawing-room fire for his especial use, so that he could put up his injured leg in comfort. Now, instead of making for his accustomed place, he went to the music cabinet and turned over the pile of songs.

"Will you sing this?" he asked.

Lady Dunbar looked at the sheet he held out to her.

"Tosti's 'Goodby'!" She looked suspiciously from one man to the other. Then she dropped the sheet onto the piano. "I—I don't think I can sing that." Again her tone was harsh and strained. "I don't think I can sing at all tonight. I'm not in good voice."

"Then will you excuse me if I go up to my room," said Blair. "I have some letters to write."

"I will see that you have all you want," said Lady Dunbar, moving to-

ward the door. But her husband intercepted her.

"I will attend to that," he said.

He followed his guest out of the room and up the stairs. The errand was superfluous. Already a well-trained manservant had been in the room making every arrangement for Blair's comfort. His pajamas, dressing-gown and slippers were warming before a clear fire. The stationery-rack on the writing-table was well stocked with notepaper, envelopes, even postcards and postage-stamps. Whisky, soda-water and biscuits were on a tray on the center-table.

"I think you have all you need," said Sir Roger, austerely hospitable.

"I think so, thanks," said Blair. He opened a drawer of the writing-table and took out two service revolvers.

"We'll use these," he said. "I always take a spare one when I go to shoot at the range, to save delay in case of a cartridge jamming."

"It's fortunate that you happened to have them with you," said Sir Reginald. "I have an old pair of dueling-pistols somewhere in the gun-room, but I don't know what condition they are in. Are you sure that there's nothing else you want? I'll leave you now, then, and call you before the house is stirring. Will five o'clock be too early?"

"I shall be ready."

"Till tomorrow, then."

DAWN was breaking sullenly over a rain-drenched world when the two men quietly let themselves out of the house next morning. Sir Reginald, dressed in rough tweed shooting kit, moved with the vigor of a man still hale enough to tramp a dozen miles over turnip-fields in any weather.

Blair had not been to bed and had not changed his clothes. He wore a raincoat over the black smoking-jacket he had worn on the previous evening. He shivered in the dark, chilly air. His face was an unhealthy gray color. He limped painfully.

"You had better choose the ground, sir," he said. "You know best where we are least likely to be disturbed."

"We'll go into the cover beyond the lodge gates. The lodge-keeper is old and deaf and unlikely to be awake yet. In any case, even if he does hear shots he'll suppose that the keeper is early at work. And there's no fear of running into the keeper, because he's laid up with rheumatism or something of the sort."

Side by side they walked across the park down a long drive bordered with a double row of ancient oaks that showed dimly through the thick mist. Sir Reginald moved like a soldier marching into action, his head erect, his eyes straight to the front.

Major Blair's bearing was anything but soldierly. He turned his head continuously from side to side to peer through the mist. He started at every sound. Great drops of sweat stood on his forehead and the fear of death was in his eyes.

"What's that?" he demanded nervously once when a scurry of unseen feet startled him.

"Only sheep," said Sir Reginald with a sneer. "I keep a score or so in the park to help the deer keep the grass down. Your nerves seem on edge this morning."

"I did not sleep last night," said Blair.

"Nor I," said Sir Reginald contemptuously.

They passed through the lodge gates, across a road, over a stile and along a road thickly carpeted with sodden leaves that stuck to their muddy boots. Fifty yards from the road Sir Reginald halted.

"This is as good a place as we shall find," he said. "The light is dim between these trees, but it is grow-

ing stronger every minute now. It's for you to say where we are to stand. All I ask is that you don't make the distance too great. My eyes are not as good as they were and I don't want to bungle."

BLAIR looked down the drive and leveled his revolver at a tree. Then he faced around and leveled it in the other direction.

"There is no advantage in the light whichever way one faces," he said. "If you will stand by that tree-root and I by this rotten stump, I think it will be equally fair to both."

"As you please." Sir Reginald advanced to the place assigned to him, faced around and stood as steady as a guardsman on parade. "I am ready."

"For the last time, sir," said Blair desperately. "Think of the consequences of this madness. Don't you realize that if I die you will hang?"

"I shall do nothing of the sort. I mean to put one bullet into your heart and another into my own head."

"You haven't yet heard my conditions," said Blair.

"Conditions! What other conditions are there to make? You chose the weapons. You chose the time. You agreed to the place. Does this mean that you are determined to shirk at the last moment?"

"I said last night that I had a condition to make and that I would make it when we were on the ground."

"Well, what is it, then?" demanded Sir Reginald scornfully.

"The condition does not bind you if you fall," said Blair. He took a sealed envelope from his pocket and handed it to his opponent. "If I fall you are to read that letter immediately. Whether you act on it I leave to your judgment. I rely on your honor to read it at once before you move from your place."

Sir Reginald turned the envelope round and round between his fingers.

"But I don't understand. What's the purpose of it?"

"You will understand when you read the letter."

Sir Reginald hesitated.

"I don't like pledging myself to do something that I don't see the purpose of."

"If you will not agree to it I will not fight."

Sir Reginald shrugged his shoulders and pocketed the letter.

"Very well, then. Will you give the signal?"

"I forgot about the signal. We ought to have a third person for that. This is where the need of seconds comes in."

"I'll suggest a signal," said Sir Reginald. "The lodge-keeper keeps fowls. I heard his cock crow as we came across the park. It is certain to crow again before long. When it does we fire as soon as we like. Do you agree to that?"

"It's the best we can do, I suppose. I agree."

THEY took up their respective positions, faced each other and waited. A swollen stream hidden in the wood plashed and gurgled. Raindrops dripped dismally from the branches of the trees onto the sodden leaves below. Five long minutes passed. Blair stretched out his left hand behind him, groped for the tree-stump and sat down on it.

"Do you mind my sitting?" he said. "My game leg, you know."

"Sit, by all means," said Sir Reginald, "if it won't handicap you."

Another long minute passed.

"Is there no other way out of this mess?" said Blair.

"None whatever."

Sir Reginald stood like a statue. Blair fidgeted. From time to time he looked nervously over his shoulder as

if afraid — or hoping — that they might be disturbed. Presently he stood up again.

"I can't stand the strain of this waiting," he said. "At the word 'one' we lift our revolver, muzzles pointing upward. At the word 'two' we take aim. At the word 'three' we fire. You say the word 'one,' I 'two,' and you 'three'."

"Very well," said Sir Reginald calmly. "One."

"Two," said Blair faintly.

"Three."

Only one shot rang out. Blair pitched forward and lay flat, his face half-buried in the wet brown leaves. A dark spot of blood under his left shoulder-blade soaked through his raincoat and spread slowly. Sir Reginald tossed his weapon onto the ground and opened and read the letter he was pledged to read:

"If you will do exactly what I advise, there need be no scandal or trouble whatever.

"Last night I wrote a number of letters to various people. In each I said that I intended to take my own life. They are on the writing-table in my bedroom. If you hand them over to the coroner instead of posting them, the inquest should be a mere formality. All you will have to do is to leave me where I fall and go back to the house at once and go to bed. Remember to lock and bolt the front door as you go in.

"At the usual time the footman who comes to call me will find that I am not in my room and that my bed has not been slept in. He will report to you. You will go at once to my room to investigate and you will see, at the top of the pile of letters I have written, one unstamped and addressed to yourself.

"In it I have said that I can't face life with a game leg, and that I am going to commit suicide. This will give you all the excuse you need to order a search to be organized and to start the suicide theory before any other occurs to anyone. If you do not care to do it for your own sake, you must do it for your wife's sake. For the last time I assure you that she is entirely innocent.

"Remember to burn this letter as soon as you reach the house." (The rest of the letter was heavily underlined.)

"It is absolutely essential that before you leave the ground you must put the revolver you used into my hand and take the one I used back to the house with you. Put it back into the left-hand drawer of the writing-table in my room, where it has been ever since your man unpacked my kit. Do this before you go to your own room or do anything else. If you neglect to do it, it will be impossible to make it appear that I took my own life."

Sir Reginald was a man of hot passions and an iron will. But he was a slow thinker. At the first reading of the letter he could fix his mind only on the last paragraph. He could not understand why the exchange of revolvers was essential or what purpose it could serve. He crumpled the note into his pocket, lifted Blair's revolver from where it had dropped from his lifeless hand, and jerked open the breach. It was clean! The revolver had not been fired! It had not even been loaded!

Only gradually did the fierce old man realize what Blair had done to save his wife from disgrace.

It was now his turn to tremble and sweat with mental agony. Until now white-hot rage and lust for revenge had nerved him. At the moment that Blair had dropped the letter into the fire he had seen his course clear before him. Knowing Blair to be a crack shot, he had anticipated but one end to the duel—a swift, honorable death for himself; the dock and the gallows for the man he hated. When he left the house he had not contemplated so much as the possibility of returning to it alive.

But Blair's chivalry had confused the issue, had turned a simple problem into a very complex one. He had to ask himself whether it would be better to solve it, as he had intended it should be solved, by blowing out his brains here and now, or to follow out the instructions contained in the letter and, after the fuss of the in-

quest was over, resume his normal life.

NEWLY risen doubts clouded his mind. What if, after all, his wife were innocent? At the dinner-table, he had regarded Blair's repeated assertion of her innocence as the sort of lie that in the circumstances any decently bred man would tell. But his reiteration of it in the letter seemed to carry the solemn weight of a death-bed deposition.

His wife was so young, so inexperienced. It was natural that in that gloomy old manor-house she had found pleasure in the society of a man more nearly her own age than himself. It was possible that, quite innocently and unintentionally, by some unmeant glance or unguarded word, she had tempted Blair to make love to her.

Or was it possible that Blair himself, despite his own admission to the contrary, was innocent? Perhaps his wife, bored with the monotony of her life, oppressed by the sombre majesty of her surroundings, had tried to tempt Blair into flirtation. Perhaps Blair had honorably refused to be tempted, but had still more honorably shielded her by shouldering all the blame. Perhaps he had refused to show the letter simply because he did not know what was written in it. Again, if this were the case, Blair had adopted the course that in the circumstances any man of honor would take.

It was even possible that had Blair had a chance to read the letter before burning it, he might have handed it over with a laugh. It may not have been a letter at all! His wife took a childish delight in drawing caricatures of people and writing nonsense verses underneath them to show to the sort of people who are amused at that sort of thing.

And yet again, Blair may have had good reason for refusing to show the letter because he knew what was in it.

Sir Reginald wavered. Should he shirk all these problems by putting a bullet in his own brain as he had meant to do? If Blair were innocent that would be a poor return for his chivalry. If his wife were innocent she was entitled to be shielded as far as was possible from the scandal that would inevitably arise if he did not carry out Blair's instructions. He must think. Thanks to Blair, he had time to think.

He could blow out his brains later if that course seemed best. Meanwhile he must do as Blair had advised. He pocketed the clean revolver and laid the fouled one in its place. Then he hurried toward the lodge gates.

Before he reached the road he heard the sound of heavy hobnailed boots resounding on it. Some farm laborer was passing on his way to work. It was necessary to keep out of sight till he passed. Since he had to wait it seemed fitting to return and stand bareheaded for a moment by the side of the dead man in homage to one who, guilty or innocent, had died like a gentleman.

As he turned to go back a new, still more complicated problem presented itself. Blair was not yet dead! He was on his hands and knees struggling to rise!

If the passing laborer were hailed and sent running to summon a doctor he might yet live. On the other hand he might die before help could come. If the doctor were sent for, it would be impossible to shield from scandal the ancient name of Dunbar. If the doctor were not sent for, the last representative of an honorable line would go to the grave with the black shame of murder on his soul.

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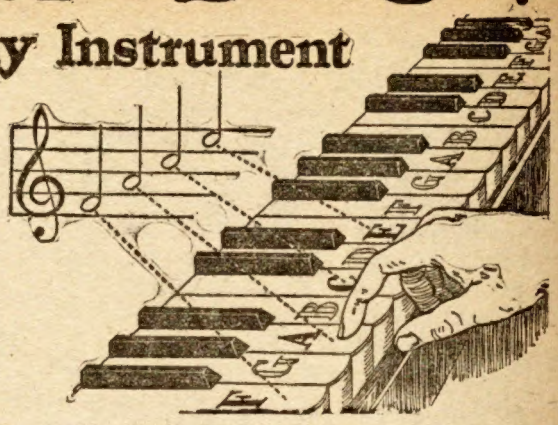

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How a Strange Accident Saved Me From Baldness-

Sixty days ago it made me boiling mad. Today I look back and laugh at the incident for it brought me a marvelous new growth of hair.

WHEN my wife began to look sorrowfully at my thinning hair I smiled regretfully. When my friends began to call me "baldy" I felt annoyed. But when my secretary began to look at my glistening scalp and snicker—well it made me mad!

But the worst was yet to come. About sixty days ago I saw a tooth-paste advertisement that offered to send a free booklet. I clipped the coupon and gave it to my secretary to fill in and mail.

Well a few days later, to my utter surprise I found on my desk—not a booklet on tooth-paste—but a booklet telling how to grow hair in 30 days!

I glanced from the booklet to my secretary. I felt my blood boiling.

"Miss Harris," I said to her, "I can't say that I appreciate your sense of humor. Just what is your idea?"

She paled. "Why, Mr. Burns—what's wrong?"

"Wrong?" I shouted, "what's the idea of sending me this hint about my hair?"

Tears came into her eyes. And between sobs she explained why it wasn't her fault.

She said the coupon I asked her to mail had another coupon printed on the back—and the other coupon offered to send a free book about baldness. Well, she simply used her own judgment!

"Hm," was all I could say.

That night on my way home I read the book about baldness. It described an entirely new method of making hair grow—perfected by Alois Merke, founder of the Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York. It is the only treatment I ever heard of that reached right down to the hair roots and awakened them.

As I read on I felt myself weakening in my resolve not to try another hair treatment. And then when I read that Merke actually guaranteed a new growth of hair in 30 days or no cost—well, I sent for the treatment.

The first two or three days, nothing happened. But a week or so later when I looked in the mirror I saw something that almost bowled me over! For there, just breaking through, was a fine downy fuzz all over my head.

Every day this young hair kept getting stronger. At the end of a month you could hardly see a bald spot. And at the end of sixty days—well, my worries were ended. For I had regained an entirely new growth of hair.

Here's the Secret

According to Alois Merke, in most baldness the hair roots are not dead, but merely **dormant.** Now to make a sickly tree grow you would not rub "growing fluid" on the leaves. Yet that is what I had been doing, when I used to douse my head with ordinary tonics, salves, etc. To make a tree grow you must nourish the **roots.** That's exactly what the Merke treatment does.

At the Merke Institute many have paid as high as $500 for results secured. Now these same results may be secured in any home where there is electricity—**for a few cents a day.**

Merke admits that his treatment will not grow hair in every case. There are some cases of baldness that nothing can help. But so many have regained hair this new way, that Merke invites you to try the treatment 30 days at his risk, and if it fails to grow hair then the trial is free. Your money is instantly refunded. You are the sole judge.

Coupon Brings You Full Details

This story is typical of the results that people are securing with the Merke Treatment.

"The New Way to Make Hair Grow," is a 34-page book which will be sent you entirely free if you mail the coupon below. This book tells all about the new treatment, shows what it has done for others, and contains much valuable information on the care of the hair. Remember, this book is yours free. And if you decide to take the treatment, you don't risk a penny. So mail coupon now. Address Allied Merke Institute, Inc., Dept. 1552, 512 Fifth Ave., New York.

Get This Free Book

Allied Merke Institute, Inc.
Dept. 1552, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

Please send me—without cost or obligation, in a plain wrapper, a copy of your book describing the Merke System.

Name .....
(State whether Mr., Mrs., or Miss)

Address .....

City ..... State .....

Read This

"My hair was coming out at an alarming rate, but after four or five treatments I noticed this was checked. My hair is coming in thicker and looks and feels full of life and vigor."—W. C., Great Neck, N. Y.

"I have used your system for eight weeks and although the top of my head has been entirely bald for six years, the results up to the present are gratifying. In fact, the entire bald spot is covered with a fine growth of hair."—W. B., Kenmore, Ohio.

(Original of above letters on file at the Institute.)

Reduce Waistline *Quickly and Easily*

Amazing New Belt Takes Off Fat Through Automatic Massage. Does Away With Heart-Straining Exercises, Disgusting Diets, Weakening Sweat-Baths! Makes You Look Thin While You Grow Thin.

THE moment you put on this wonderful new self-massaging belt your waist is instantly reduced from 2 to 6 inches—but better still, you actually grow thinner day by day. At the same time all your stomach disorders, constipation, backaches and shortness of breath generally disappear as the sagging internal organs are put back in normal place. You are filled with a wonderful new energy, and look and feel 10 to 15 years younger!

This amazing new belt marks a wonderful new freedom for stout men—freedom from monotonous, heart-straining exercises — freedom from disgusting reducing diets—freedom from weakening sweat-baths, dangerous pills, and dreary self-denials!

New Youth-Giving Belt Massages Away Fat

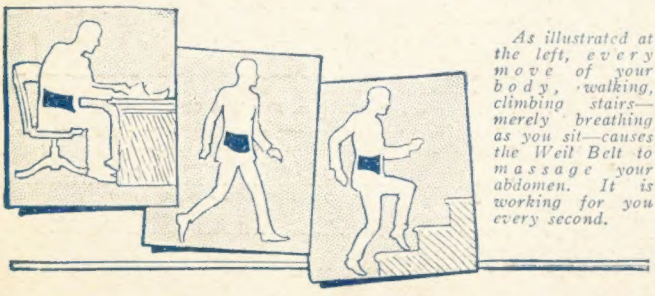
This marvelous new kind of belt known as the Weil Scientific Reducing Belt produces the same results as an expert masseur—only quicker, and cheaper. The Weil Belt does not merely draw in your waist and make you appear thinner. It actually takes off the fat by gently but constantly massaging the bulging fat tissues. It sets up a vigorous circulation that seems to melt away the surplus fat. With every move you make, with every breath you take, your abdomen receives this gentle but effective pressure and gradually but surely inches of fat are massaged away.

Reduce the Way Athletes Do

The Weil Belt is made of the same kind of scientifically treated rubber that is used by hundreds of professional athletes and jockeys because it not only reduces quickly but at the same time preserves their strength. It is highly indorsed for its healthful principles by physicians everywhere. Satisfaction guaranteed or your money instantly refunded without question. The Weil Co. 1161 Hill Street, New Haven, Conn.

SPECIAL TRIAL OFFER!

Write at once for full description and details of the Special 10 day trial offer being made by The Weil Company, 1161 Hill Street, New Haven, Conn.



As illustrated at the left, every move of your body, walking, climbing stairs—merely breathing as you sit—causes the Weil Belt to massage your abdomen. It is working for you every second.

THE WEIL COMPANY
1161 Hill Street, New Haven, Conn.

GENTLEMEN—Please send me, without obligation, complete description of the Weil Scientific Reducing Belt and also your special 10-day trial offer.

Name .....

Address .....

City .....*State* .....